

A Chance Encounter

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1. Tuesday lunchtime

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_Another Sanji x Nami modern AU. I figured I might as well try my hand at it. ^__^

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><p>It was Tuesday around lunchtime. It could have been any other Tuesday to Sanji Vinsmoke. Tuesdays were one of his elected days off. Being co-owner of a restaurant, he could have chosen to take any day off. Having Tuesdays off was just a habit of his from when he was a Sous-Chef. It also meant he could avoid a certain someone at the restaurant who worked every Tuesday.<p>

"Are you sure you don't want to have lunch at the restaurant today? Mr. Zeff is here." The feminine voice sounded exotic even over the phone. To any stranger, it probably belonged to an older, experienced, world-travelled woman. Sanji knew better.

"No, Ivan-chan," the blond man sighed in response, an unlit cigarette hung between his lips. "That's exactly why I don't want to have lunch there today." He held the phone against his ear with his left hand while locking his apartment door with his right.

Emporio Ivankov, or Ivan-chan, was manager of the wait staff at Sanji's restaurant. He was also a very outspoken drag queen who always made it a point to meddle in Sanji's personal life, including family relationships. "Alright then, but don't come crying to me when Mr. Zeff refuses to talk to you again, you candy boy!"

"Yeah, yeah, yeah," Sanji rolled his eyes at the nickname and briefly wondered if he could call it sexual harassment when Ivan-chan was working for him. He wasn't worried about the fickle grumpiness of his adoptive dad, Zeff. The old geezer may always look angry, but Sanji knew he cared. "Just give me a call if there are any emergencies. Bye." He ended the call before facing any further attempts to make him feel guilty.

Checking the apartment door handle to make sure it was securely locked; Sanji put his phone away in the pocket of his dark blue blazer and made his way to the stairwell. He lived on the third floor of an upscale apartment building in a well-established part of the city. The neighborhood was ideal for him since it was pretty quiet at night and there was a locally owned grocery store with regularly stocked fresh produce nearby.

As soon as he was outside the building, Sanji lit his cigarette and took a long drag. Lunch came to mind again. It wasn't that the food at the restaurant was bad, of course. He personally created the menu himself. It was just that the last place he wanted to be on his day off was at work. Besides, there was a sandwich shop down the street from his apartment that he wanted to check out after it was highly recommended by his friend, Usopp.

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It was Tuesday around lunchtime. It could have been any other weekday to Nami as she sat, staring at the computer screen but not really paying attention to anything. She had already completed her list of work for the day by 10am. Now she was bored and scrolling through the classifieds on a news website.

Nami didn't really mind working as a broadcast meteorologist. Her job was to gather data and create the weather forecast for the local news sources. This responsibility didn't solely fall on her shoulders, either. Despite knowing that she was more knowledgeable than any of them, Nami worked with a small team who were mostly tolerableâ€! Actually, everyone was pretty nice except for a certain television broadcaster who reveled in flaunting his popularity.

Cavendish was a young man with bright blue eyes and long, blond hair that belonged more on a famous female celebrity than on a local TV weatherman. When Nami first met him, the man had complimented her on her beauty. Then he went into a long explanation about how he was much more beautiful than her. After the explanation, he proceeded to threaten that if she were to ever get any "crazy" ideas of trying to take his place as the TV weather presenter, he would find a way to make sure she never worked in meteorology again. Thankfully, Nami had no desire to be on TV, so Cavendish had nothing to worry about. It still didn't make him any less annoying though.

With her chin resting in her left hand, Nami blew a strand of red-orange hair out of her face and continued to scroll through the classifieds. AKC registered Yorkies for sale, a rebuilt grand piano for sale at the same price. Nami sighed, starting to feel hungry. Her eyes shifted to the corner of her screen. 12:30pm already? Switching off her monitor, she figured it was time for lunch and quickly went through her options. She decided to go to the sandwich shop again. It was only three blocks away and they knew her pretty well.

2. The Cafe

The sandwich shop was called The Mermaid CafÃ©. It was a small establishment that not only sold soup and sandwiches, but also smoothies, desserts, and freshly baked bread. It was only open until 4pm on weekdays and closed on the weekends. Sanji was surprised that he had never noticed the place. Then again, his work didn't really allow him time to wander the neighborhood during the day and he was usually busy doing his laundry on Tuesdays.

As he approached the cafÃ©, Sanji observed that all of the tables outside were occupied. Was this place really that popular? He checked his phone for the time. 12:45pm already? It was probably still their lunch rush. This meant that he would have to get his food to goâ€¦ not that he wanted to sit in a crowded cafÃ© by himself.

Opening the door, Sanji saw that there was already a line to order. He almost turned around and left but figured Usopp wouldn't stop bugging him until he at least tried the food once. Taking a glance at the menu board, there were plenty of options to order from without being too overwhelming. The prices were a little high, but that was the same anywhere in the neighborhood.

Deciding on a turkey, bacon, and spinach panini, Sanji's attention shifted to the line in front of him. It appeared that there were maybe three or four people in front of him now. He couldn't tell exactly since the place was crowded. Not too much longer of a wait, though.

Suddenly, there was a buzzing from the phone belonging to the man in front of him. "Hey Koalaâ€¦ No, I thought we were meeting at the cafÃ©." He raked his fingers through his wavy blond hair. "Well, just wait. I'll be right there." Sanji thought he could hear a woman protesting on the other end when the man hung up on her. He turned to Sanji as he started to get out of the line. "Go ahead, man. My girlfriend decided to meet somewhere else for lunch."

"Oh, thank you," Sanji murmured. The guy was already halfway out the door. Facing forward again, Sanji noticed a young lady directly in front of him. Her long, fiery red hair was perfectly complemented by a short, navy blue trench coat. A black pencil skirt with a short slit in the back ran to just above her knees. From what Sanji could tell, the lady didn't appear to be wearing stockings, but she did have some very nice legs that ran into a pair of red high heels.

Hearing her sigh, Sanji realized that he was completely checking her out and quickly brought his eyes forward again. For a second, he feared that she caught him red-handed, but she was still looking ahead towards the order counter. When she rolled her shoulders back, Sanji suppressed the urge to rub them for her. He shook the inappropriate thought from his head. Don't be a pervert!

Checking out women from behind could lead to trouble. Just because she looked perfect from behind didn't mean that she would be beautiful. There were plenty of Ivan-chan's friends who looked like decent women from behind but were noticeably men from the front. And even if this lady did end up being beautiful, that didn't necessarily mean she would be a nice person.

Sanji took a deep breath and decided that he couldn't form any opinion of the lady until he was able to judge her character, beautiful or not. He nodded once and tried to stand firm. Then she approached the counter to place her order. Her voice was so friendly with the female cashier. Sanji couldn't make out what she was saying over the rest of the noise in the cafÃ©, but when he heard her laugh, he felt his heart beating loudly against his chest.

The lady completed her order, paid, and left a decent tip. When she turned around, Sanji's breath caught in his throat. "Beautiful" couldn't even begin to describe her. Shakespeare came to mind. "Did my heart love till now? Forswear it, sight! For I never saw true beauty till this nightâ€|" or however it went. Romeo and Juliet wasn't the best of Shakespeare's works, but the line was romantic. What the hell was Sanji worrying about Shakespeare for right now anyways? There was an actual goddess standing in front of him.

"Oops! Sorry," she smiled as she nearly bumped right into him. Long eyelashes fluttered as her soft brown eyes met his. There was a light, rosy glow to her cheeks. Was she blushing at him? "Please excuse me," she giggled as she squeezed past him, her body brushing against his arm as she passed, and walked towards the pick-up counter.

Everything felt like it was moving in slow motion. Sanji watched the woman walk away from him, red hair bouncing, and a smile still on her face. It was as if she were a model in a music video with Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 21 playing in the background. He, on the other hand, was completely dumbstruck and unable to move. Faintly, in the distance, he could hear the cashier from behind the counter. "Sir? Are you ready to order?"

Sanji finally turned to look at the young female cashier. "Huh?" He blinked a few times. "Ohâ€| yeahâ€|" What was he going to order again?

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Nami stood in line at The Mermaid CafÃ©, waiting to order. This place was always busy at lunchtime. It was also a bit pricey, but the food was definitely worth it. They also did half orders, which meant half the price. Nami could never finish a whole order anyways.

"Hey Koalaâ€| No, I thought we were meeting at the cafÃ©." She could hear the man behind her on his phone. "Well, just wait. I'll be right there." Nami smirked. He was probably talking to his girlfriend. She then heard him speak to the person behind him in line. "Go ahead, man. My girlfriend decided to meet somewhere else for lunch." Nami bit back a smile. Of course she was right. She was always right. Poor guy. There was probably going to be hell to pay.

Looking up at the menu board again, Nami was trying to decide between the chicken cordon bleu wrap and the turkey, bacon, and spinach panini. At least the panini had spinach in it. She needed more vegetables in her diet. That is what Dr. Chopper told her, anyways. She would also order her usual small orange sunrise smoothie. There were other fruits in there, plus vitamin C and an immunity boosterâ€| or something like that. All that she cared about was the orange part

and that it was delicious.

Shifting her focus forwards again, Nami couldn't shake the feeling that someone was checking her out. She let out a sigh. It wasn't the first time. It wouldn't be the last. With an amused smile, she decided to give them a little show. Stretching her neck to one side and then the other, she rolled her shoulders back. It felt good after sitting all morning at her desk. Strange though, that move would usually get a grunt or some sort of noise out of whomever was checking her out. Then she could turn around and catch them red-handed. Instead she heard nothing. Maybe I'm losing my touch.

"Hey Nami, how are you today? Are you ready to order?" The young female cashier with short, bright green hair was Camie. She was really sweet and always got Nami's order right. Nami didn't have all of the workers' names down yet, but she came in often enough to recognize Camie by now. "Do you want your usual?"

Nami let out a laugh. They knew her too well. "I'm good, thank you." She smiled at the young cashier. "Can I please get a half order of the turkey, bacon, and spinach panini, and can I also get a small orange sunrise smoothie?"

Camie rang up her total. "You're not getting the wrap this time?"

"No, I figure I needed more spinach," Nami laughed again as she paid for her meal. She left a 20% tip in the jar and thanked Camie. Turning around, she nearly ran right into a tall, blond man who had been standing behind her.

"Oops! Sorry," she smiled at him. Oh my God, he's hot! His shaggy blond hair covered his right eye. Nami noticed a bit of facial scruff, which she found sexy. His outfit was very sharp, with a navy blue blazer, a white, fitted, V-neck T-shirt, and dark denim jeans. Even his black shoes were polished and clean. His body wasn't bulky, but more lean and muscular, which she preferred. Most of the bulky ones tended to be idiots in her experience. He was better looking than any of the other men she had ever seen in the cafÃ©.

Was this handsome guy standing right behind her the whole time? No, he must have been behind the guy with the girlfriend who left after he received that phone call. Nami somehow managed to make eye contact with the blond man and felt giddy when she saw how blue his eyes were. She couldn't help blushing. "Please excuse me," she giggled as she squeezed past him, making sure to brush against his arm as she passed. It must have worked because he watched her the entire time as she walked towards the pick-up counter.

Nami bit her bottom lip in an attempt to suppress her giggling as she watched the blond man stumble through his order with Camie. She took out her phone to text her friend Robin as to what she should do next. While on her phone, she kept sneaking glances up at the man until she noticed that he had finished paying and was now making his way towards her at the pick-up counter.

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Sanji slowly walked towards the pick-up counter while running through

what to say to the red-haired woman. He wanted to say something to her. He actually wanted to ask her out, but he didn't have the courage to do that straight away. Besides, she might find him creepy if he did that right away.

What to say, what to say, what to sayâ€| Did people even actually physically approach others anymore? He had tried the whole online dating thing and found it lacking in quality. Too many people on dating sites were just looking for hook-ups. Sanji knew he was in the minority, but he actually wanted more in a relationship. His co-workers and friends always made fun of him for being a hopeless romantic. That was part of his character, though. A leopard can't change its spots and Sanji definitely didn't want to change his.

Now there was actually an unbelievably beautiful woman standing right next to him, but he couldn't think of a damn thing to say to her. She was looking at her phone, flipping through various social media sites. Then she checked the weather, shaking her head in what appeared to be disagreement with the weather forecast. Finally, there was a ping of a text message. She giggled before replying to the text.

All the while, Sanji was trying his hardest to not outright stare at the woman. He attempted several glances, but kept his balance by continually looking out the windows of the cafÃ©. When he turned his gaze back to the red-haired lady, he was surprised to see that she had put her phone away. She tilted her head to the right and reached behind with her hand to pull her long hair to the side, exposing her neck. Sanji briefly pondered how soft her skin was and what it would taste like under his tongue. He froze when he realized that she caught him staring at her, peering at him out of the corner of her brown eyes. A knowing smile crept to the corner of her lips.

Sanji quickly looked away, taking a deep breath to try to calm his nerves. He could really use a cigarette but, like most restaurants, the cafÃ© had a no smoking policy. That was it. He blew it. There would be no way that she would even speak to him now. He had to at least apologize for gawking at her though. Letting out a sigh, he turned to the womanâ€|

"Nami," the worker called from the pick-up counter. The red-haired goddess moved to the counter to grab her order. So, her name is Nami. Sanji seemed to watch her in slow motion again as she began to walk towards the exit. He could have sworn that she glanced at him and smiled as she passed him. Then she was gone.

A minute later, his order was ready. "Sanji," the worker called. Feeling completely gutted and empty for letting such a rare woman get away without even saying "hi" to her, he slowly approached the counter.

Out of curiosity, he decided to ask the worker a question while he grabbed his food. Sanji took a hopeful breath. "Hey. This may seem a little crazy, but that lady that had the order before mineâ€|"

"Oh, you mean Nami?" The girl with light pink hair behind the counter clarified. Her innocence stunned Sanji for a moment. He wondered how many other men had inquired about the lady before.

"Umâ€| yeah." He took another deep breath. "Does she come in here

often?"

"Yeah," the girl smiled now. "She's a regular of ours. She doesn't come in **every** day, but maybeâ€| likeâ€| every other day." The worker seemed proud of the fact.

Sanji let out a sigh of relief and thanked the girl before leaving with his food. Maybe he could try to meet Nami again. If anything, he could at least apologize for ogling her. He would have to try when he was off from work again and the cafÃ© was open, which meant waiting until the following Tuesday.

3. Friday afternoon

Friday afternoons were absolutely boring for Nami. She twirled in a swivel chair while her friend continued to work. Robin was older than Nami and a fact-checker with the organization in the building. Where Nami gathered data for the weather, Robin checked facts for the news. She was a tall, slender woman with very ample curves, sky blue eyes, and raven black hair that ran down past her shoulders. Robin also had a very fashionable wardrobe that had the sole purpose of accentuating her curves, rather than all-out exposing themâ€| although the neckline of most of her outfits was a bit questionable for work. Her explanation was always the same though, _"They're just breasts."_ Which was an excellent point in Nami's opinion.

Most importantly, Robin was Nami's best friend and confidant. The younger woman knew she could always rely on her friend for advice. "So, I take it he wasn't there again today?" Nami could actually hear the smile in Robin's voice without seeing her face.

There was a sigh in response and Robin chuckled. "Noâ€|" Nami finally replied. "I don't get it. I thought he looked interested. He was practically staring at me the entire time I was in there." Nami felt her toes lightly drag along the office floor, slowing the twirling of her chair. This was the third day in a row she had gone to The Mermaid CafÃ© for lunch in an attempt to meet the tall, blond man again. She even went at the same time every day, hoping that maybe he held some sort of schedule and she had just never caught him before.

"You even tried the neck move that I recommended?" Robin peered over her oval glasses. When she had received a text from her friend on Tuesday asking for advice on how to attract a man she saw in the cafÃ©, the older woman couldn't hide her amusement. If Nami was asking **her** for advice then this man had to be somewhat special.

"Yes, I did it almost immediately after you texted me. I made sure he was looking when I did it." Nami was pouting now. The one time that she actually wanted a guy to make a move on her and he did nothing. Why?

Maybe he was gay. He was better dressed than most straight men she knew. That wouldn't make sense, though, because he was definitely checking her out. Or maybe she had a stain on her clothes somewhere that he found completely appalling. Then again, she didn't remember seeing any stains when undressing that evening. Maybe he was shy. She should have just said something to him rather than waiting for him to

make the first move.

Robin could see the excuses running through Nami's mind. "Maybe it was just his day off," she offered with a smile. When she saw the swivel chair come to an abrupt halt, she chuckled again and went back to her work.

Maybe it was his day off! How could Nami not think of it sooner? That would mean he had some different kind of job than a regular 9-5. If Nami tried going to the cafÃ© next Tuesday, would he be there again?

There was a knock on Robin's office door. "Come in," the lady replied. Nami quickly put her shoes back on and pulled the swivel chair up to Robin's desk. She had already finished her work but she didn't want to look like a complete slacker to her co-workers.

A man with black curly hair tied back and a long, distinctive nose tentatively opened the door. Usopp was a technician in the building. Nami thought he was friendly but he tended to stretch the truth. It was a good thing that he wasn't one of the news reporters. He would probably have the city thinking that aliens were attacking.

"H-hey ladies," he smiled. "Umâ€œ! Were you both still coming to my birthday dinner tonight?" There was a hint of nervousness in his voice. Nami couldn't understand why. Were women really that intimidating, or was it just Robin and herself that this guy was afraid of?

"Wait a minute! That's tonight?" Nami had been so caught up in trying to meet the blond guy again that she completely forgot about Usopp's birthday dinner. The majority of the staff had planned on going. Missing it would be a huge mistake for workplace etiquette. But seriously, who was born on April Fool's Day?

"Well, yeah. I even reserved a room at All Blue to accommodate everyone." He was obviously very proud to be having his birthday dinner at such an exclusive restaurant. Nami's eyes narrowed at the technician. Was this another one of Usopp's lies? Some elaborate April Fool's prank?

"How did you get a room reserved at All Blue? I thought there was at least a month's wait at that place." Nami pressed him. She wanted to see if he would crack under the pressure. No way could someone like Usopp get into a place like All Blue.

He appeared to be a bit offended. Of all the times, this was actually the truth and no one was believing him. "I know one of the owners. He's a friend of mine."

Nami was about to argue further when Robin interrupted her. "Of course we'll be there," she smiled. "We wouldn't dream of missing it." The red-haired woman stared at her friend, but she only received a shrug in response.

"Great! See you there at 6pm!" Usopp was relieved as he closed the door. It would be a horrible birthday dinner if no one showed.

Friday evenings were one of the busiest nights of the week for Sanji. The dinner rush on Friday and Saturday evenings were when his restaurant made the most business. He couldn't leave that responsibility to just anyone. Fridays also meant that the old geezer was at his other restaurant, The Baratie, and Sanji could actually run All Blue by himself. By the end of Saturday, he was always exhausted and ready to have Sunday off.

Hopefully being busy would also mean that he would stop thinking about the red-haired goddess he met last Tuesday. Well, he couldn't exactly say that he "met" her. More like he stared at her while she was probably creeped out and thought he was a pervert. Sanji sighed and inwardly cringed at the memory.

He tried asking some of his friends and co-workers for advice, or at least their take on the situation. Ivan-chan was encouraging and actually thought that the lady was interested since she smiled at Sanji. Zoro, the bartender who seemed to spend more time drinking than making actual drinks, told Sanji that he was an idiot for not saying anything. No sympathy there. Finally, Luffy, busboy and one of Sanji's oldest friends, was completely clueless on the topic and asked if the lady could cook meat. If she could cook meat, then she was a keeper. Sanji wondered if it may have been a mistake to hire so many of his friends.

The mysterious lady, Nami, had occupied most of his thoughts for the past four days. She was in every dream he had since last Tuesday and he must have had at least half a dozen fantasies about her by now! not all of them were sexy! But at the heart of all of his thoughts, Sanji held deep regret for not getting the courage to talk to her. He promised himself that he would make an effort to go back to The Mermaid CafÃ© next Tuesday in an attempt to meet her again and at least apologize for staring like some sort of weirdo. He knew his chances of ever meeting her again were slim, but he had to try.

Now there was nothing else to do but wait, as every day seemed to go by agonizingly slow. Tonight, in addition to being a usually busy night, Usopp would be having his birthday dinner with most of the staff from his work. Sanji couldn't join his friend since he was working, but he would definitely give the group the best service, food, and dining experience available. Maybe he would also get the chance to talk with his friend about the lady. Usopp was known to lie about some experiences, but he always offered an honest opinion in times of need.

Checking the clock, Sanji realized it was 5:45pm. Usopp's party would be arriving soon. The blond man found two of his best waiters, Ace and Marco, and asked them to prepare the private dining room. Usopp estimated around 40 people total, so not all of the guests could sit at the same table. Sanji figured five round tables with eight guests per table would work. He would never dream of charging his friend for his own birthday meal, but such a large group was sure to bring in good business.

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6:05pm, Robin and Nami were fashionably late. Nami hated being the first to arrive to anything. It usually guaranteed some awkward silences until more people showed up. She would rather be a little

late than suffer social awkwardness.

The two ladies entered All Blue and Nami let out a small gasp in awe. The restaurant had a modern dÃ©cor, but the ambiance felt like the entire room was under the ocean. There were no tacky decorations, like the fishing nets, anchors, and crab traps you would find at seafood restaurant chains. Just a deep blue color and soft lighting that left the impression of being underwater without being too dark. It was very simplistic, relaxing, and stylish. Nami was particularly impressed with the giant wall aquarium that lined the right side of the main dining area.

"Good evening ladies, do you have dinner reservations?" A hostess with very curly purple hair and an exotic accent greeted Robin and Nami. The hostess's makeup was a little thick, but Nami figured that everyone had different tastes.

"We're here for the large dinner party," Robin smiled.

"Ah, for Usopp!" The hostess's eyes lit up. "Right this way. They've been waiting for you."

Nami gave Robin a questioning look, but again she only received a shrug in response. The hostess led the two women through the restaurant and into a private dining room. Nami realized that the giant aquarium actually separated the main dining room from the private room.

"Hey! You both made it!" Usopp ran up to the women with a look of relief. "Sorry for waiting on you both, but most of the guys said that they wouldn't come unless both of you were here," he whispered to them. Nami gave another questioning look and glanced at the staff that came to the dinner party.

There were five dining tables that seated eight people each. Aside from Nami and Robin, there were only four other women at the party. Kalifa, one of the producers, was a blonde woman who liked to adjust her glasses while accusing people of sexual harassment. Perona worked in wardrobe and liked cute, creepy things. Hancock was one of the newscasters who liked to argue with Cavendish over who was more beautiful. Finally, sitting next to Usopp, was Kaya. She didn't work with them, but she was Usopp's girlfriend. Nami thought that she must have the patience of a saint to put up with the pranks that Usopp pulled.

Nami was a bit annoyed, but Robin just put on her beautiful smile as always. Feigning flattery, she placed a hand on her cheek in embarrassment. "Oh my! All of this waiting just for us?" Nami let out a small laugh. Robin definitely knew how to be polite.

"I'll show you to your seats," the hostess gently interrupted them. Robin and Nami nodded as they followed the curly purple hair. There were two empty seats at the fifth table in the back of the room. Nami was happy to see that her seat was right next to the aquarium wall. She could see through the glass to the main dining area. "May I take your coats?" The hostess offered.

Robin removed her dark purple coat to reveal a form-fitting, black, silk, floor length gown. The sleeves of her gown were made of black mesh that covered the bodice as well. Robin's cleavage was visible

even through the mesh. Franky, a technician like Usopp, was seated next to her and immediately jumped up to pull out her chair. "Thank you," she smiled as she took her seat.

The hostess then came and took Nami's coat. Nami chose to be much less dramatic than her friend by wearing a simple, cream colored, chiffon dress that fell to just below her knees. The halter neckline was securely tied at the back of her neck. The last thing she wanted was a wardrobe malfunction in front of the majority of the staff. "Hmmmmâ€|. " Nami heard the hostess appraising her from behind.

"What?" Nami asked innocently. Did the hostess think she was underdressed compared to her friend?

"Nothing," the hostess smiled at her. "I just noticed that you have a navy blue trench coat and red high heels." Nami nodded with some uncertainty. "Very interesting," the hostess commented before leaving.

Nami was about to take her own seat when Coby jumped up to pull out her chair. Coby was a very young man with purple hair and was pretty much the gofer for the production staff. Nami would have felt sorry for him if he wasn't so eager to please his co-workers. "Thank you, Coby." She sat down in her chair.

Turning to Robin, Nami whispered, "that was odd."

"What?" Robin questioned in a hushed voice.

"The hostessâ€|" Nami began.

"Was an okama?" Robin replied. Nami's eyes opened wide with shock.

"What? Really?" She couldn't believe it. Was the lighting in the restaurant that good? "How could you tell?"

"He had an Adam's apple." Robin smiled, "but I don't think that was what you were focusing on."

"Umâ€| No." Nami took a moment to compose her thoughts. "The hostess commented on the fact that I have red high heels and a blue trench coat. That was kind of weird."

5. Birthday Cake

As soon as Ivan-chan finished hanging up the coats, he practically ran for the kitchen. "Mr. Vinsmoke! Where is Mr. Vinsmoke?" Ivan-chan stood on his tip-toes, looking for a mop of shaggy blond hair.

"Ivan-chan!" Luffy gave the hostess a huge smile. "Sanji went out back to have a cigarette."

"Thank you, straw hat boy!" Ivan-chan blew past Luffy towards the exit to the loading dock. He stopped for a moment to catch his breath before opening the door.

Sure enough, Sanji was standing out on the loading dock, smoking a cigarette. He was well dressed, as usual, in a black three-piece suit. The collar of his blue pinstriped dress shirt was visible and matched his azure silk tie. Ivan-chan could admit that Sanji had some bad manners, smoking being one of them, but he would never call the young man a bad dresser. "Candy boy!"

"What is it, Ivan-chan?" Sanji took a drag from his cigarette. The smoke disappeared into the night sky as he exhaled. His smoke break was one of the few moments he got to himself during the evening. He didn't like sharing it with others. "Shouldn't you be up at the front?"

"Bon-chan is helping me host this evening." Ivan-chan explained before indulging his boss with some information. "I figured you would like to know that there is a young lady that you may take some interest in at your friend's dinner party."

Sanji sighed. "I'm not interested in Boa Hancock. That woman's ego could crush an entire village of men." The only man that didn't seem fazed by any of that woman's manipulations was Luffy, but he was so innocent, he had the libido of an asexual mushroom.

"No, it's not the Hancock woman." Ivan-chan teased with a smile. "I think you'll take an interest in this one." That was all of the information that he was going to reveal. He wanted to see the surprise on the young man's face.

Glancing at the okama, Sanji extinguished his cigarette. "Fine, Ivan-chan, I'll bite." He shook his head in disbelief. Ivan-chan should know how caught up he was on Nami, despite knowing practically nothing about her. "I'll assist Ace and Marco with bringing the cake in for Usopp." Sanji held the door open for his co-worker and confidant as both men headed back inside.

â€|

Nami tuned out most of the chatter from the dinner party as she stared at the fish in the aquarium. Franky had monopolized most of Robin's attention during the evening. Some of her co-workers tried to approach Nami, but aside from small chit-chat, she wasn't really interested in interacting with anyone. She was still annoyed that Usopp had invited only six women out of 39 guests total to his birthday dinner. What kind of sexist bullshit was that? Or maybe the other women in the organization couldn't make it? Regardless, it was still annoying. Nami sighed. What the hell am I doing here?

At that moment, the lights in the private dining room were dimmed and a few people began singing "Happy Birthday" to Usopp. Nami couldn't see well with the lights dimmed, but she could make out a two tiered cake covered in candles being wheeled in on a serving cart. As everyone finished singing, Usopp blew out his candles and the lights came back on.

There was a round of applause from everyone in the room. Nami grabbed Robin's right arm and froze. "Nami, what is it? What's wrong?" Robin whispered to her friend. At the front of the room, standing next to Usopp was the tall, blond man from the cafÃ©. His smile was tender and charming, something that Nami didn't get the chance to see when they were in the sandwich shop.

With a pain in her chest, Nami had the sudden desire to get to know him better. She wanted to know his likes and dislikes, what interests he had, what he enjoyed to do in his free time. What occurred in the sandwich shop was some mindless flirting on her end to try to physically attract a hot guy. After seeing him smile, she could tell that he was so much more than that. No wonder he didn't make a move on her at the time.

â€|

Sanji stood up straight and addressed the group. "Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you so much for coming out for Usopp's birthday dinner." He made sure to scan the room as he spoke to everyone. "Welcome to All Blue. My name is Sanji Vinsmoke and I am one of the owners. Please feel free to come find me if you need anythingâ€|" His words trailed off as he came across the lady that Ivan-chan had teased him with. She was sat at the fifth table in the back of the room, next to the aquarium. It was none other than the red-haired goddess, Nami, herself.

An eternity seemed to pass between them as their eyes were locked on each other. Robin looked to her friend and then to the restaurant owner, noting the interaction. She chuckled to herself. "Oh my, Nami. You sure know how to pick them."

6. The Company Ink

"Uhâ€|" Sanji had completely lost his train of thought. Actually he lost any thought process whatsoever, including the ability to speak, apparently. He was enthralled in gentle brown eyes, fiery red hair, slightly blushed cheeks, and gently parted, petal soft lipsâ€| Sanji stopped himself there before travelling any further down her body and causing a nosebleed. He cleared his throat. "Otherwise I will leave you in the capable hands of my two best servers, Marco and Ace."

That was the cue for the two waiters to start taking dinner orders from the party guests. Usopp pulled Sanji's right arm so that he ended up crouching next to his friend. "What the hell was that about? Are you okay?"

"It's her!" Sanji smiled in amazement. "It's really her! I can't believe she's here!"

"Who? Who are you talking about?" Usopp looked around the room at the small group of female guests. "Boa Hancock?"

Sanji gave his friend a disgusted look. "Oh God, no!" He peered over the edge of the dining table to take another look at Nami. It really was her! She was even more beautiful than he remembered and she was actually in his restaurant, at his friend's birthday dinner of all places!

Wait a minuteâ€| "Usopp," Sanji began as he turned to his friend. "That beautiful red-haired woman at the back tableâ€|"

"Nami?" Usopp gave a nervous glance in her direction. The woman terrified him. She was so intimidating and manipulativeâ€| at least

that's what he heard from the other guys.

"Yeah," Sanji smiled. "What do you know about her? Is she single? Does she have a boyfriend? Girlfriend? What is she like? What foods does she like? Whatâ€|"

Usopp interrupted him. "Sanji, you cannot be serious. Nami? How do you even know her? Have you met her before? Or is this just you blindly chasing after yet another woman?"

Sanji's smile fell into a hard, straight line that scared his friend. "I saw her in The Mermaid CafÃ© last Tuesday. It was my day off and I decided to check the place out after you kept recommending it." Sanji's eyes fell a bit as he remembered the interaction. "I wanted to talk with her, but I couldn't think of what to say. Then, to make matters worse, she caught me staring at her." He had a sad expression on his face that bothered Usopp. "I planned on going to the cafÃ© when I'm off next Tuesday to see if I could meet her again and at least apologize for staring."

Usopp frowned a bit. He didn't like to see his friend in pain. "Well, Nami is one of the broadcast meteorologists and she's single, but you don't want to get involved with that woman. I heard from the other guys that she's ruthless." Sanji's expression scared him again.

"What makes them say that?" He almost growled his response. Usopp could tell that he really liked Nami.

"Uhhhâ€|" Usopp thought before speaking. He knew how hard Sanji could kick and he didn't feel like being on the receiving end, especially on his birthday. "Well, see all of my male co-workers in here?"

Sanji looked around. None of them were really impressive.

"Yeah."

"At one time or another, they have all attempted to ask her out on a date." Sanji didn't look very surprised at Usopp's observation. "And she has turned down every single one without even giving them so much as a snowball's chance in hell. Trust me," he was pleading with his blond friend now. "She will tear your heart out."

Sanji's head was hanging slightly forward. Usopp couldn't read his expression. His blond hair hung over his eyes. Suddenly there was a soft chuckle and Sanji finally responded. "That's not a fair judgment and I'll give you two reasons why."

Usopp gulped. "Okayâ€|"

Sanji looked up at his friend. "First, it's common sense that 'you never dip your pen in the company ink.' Failed workplace romances just lead to awkwardness and trouble amongst co-workers. I don't blame her for turning down all offers from the workplace staff."

Usopp nodded. His friend did make a good point. "Soâ€| what's your second reason?"

Sanji grinned at him now. "No man in this room is worthy of that

woman." He looked over to see Ace finish with taking the orders at her table. "But I'm going to damn well try." Usopp heard a soft 'oh' from Kaya seated next to him. Sanji quickly stood up and exited the room with Ace.

"He's an idiot," Usopp commented in disbelief. He looked over at Nami and was surprised to see her eyes following Sanji even through the glass of the aquarium. There was a slight flush to her cheeks. Could it be true that the frightening cruel woman was interested in him?

â€|

Sanji quickly exited the private dining room with his servers. The three men were making their way to the kitchen. "Ace!" He called to the man with wavy black hair and freckles.

"Yes, boss." Ace was friendly and approachable, which made him the perfect waiter. He was also Luffy's older brother and helped with keeping the younger boy in line at work.

"What did the beautiful red-haired lady at table five order?" Sanji inquired.

"Ummâ€|" Ace checked his list. "She ordered the salmon with orange fennel sauce. Why?"

Sanji smiled. "Tell Chef Carne that I'm personally making that order."

7. Dinner

Nami couldn't take her eyes off of him. His deep blue gaze completely captivated her. "Uhâ€|" She heard him make some sort of noise. When his eyes shifted to her mouth, she felt a thrill rush through her. If they weren't at opposite ends of the room, she probably would have kissed him, oblivious to anyone elseâ€| Which was crazy considering that she barely knew anything about him. Sanji cleared his throat. "Otherwise I will leave you in the capable hands of my two best servers, Marco and Ace."

Usopp dragged the blond man down next to him, out of her view, and the spell was broken. Nami blinked a few times, then heard Robin chuckling beside her. "Welcome back," her friend smiled at her. Nami blushed even more. "So that was the cafÃ© man?" Robin questioned.

Nami nodded. "I didn't know that he was one of the owners of All Blue. He probably thought I was a complete idiot in the cafÃ©." She cringed. "That's why he didn't make a move on me."

Robin was laughing again. "Judging from the intense, longing gaze you just gave each other, I highly doubt that." One of the waiters approached their table and began to take their orders. "You know," Robin whispered to her friend, "Usopp keeps looking at you with a very nervous expression." What could Usopp be telling him? Nami tried to look at Sanji again, but all she could see was the top of his blond hair.

"And what will you have, madam?" The waiter with wavy black hair and a splatter of freckles startled Nami with the question. She didn't even have a chance to look at the menu. Quickly finding a dish that had salmon and a type of orange sauce, Nami decided on that. "Would you like anything to drink?" The server added.

"Just water, please," Nami replied, folding the menu and handing it to the waiter. All Blue was definitely an exclusive restaurant, with prices to match. She had to be thankful to Usopp for one thing. If he didn't decide to have his birthday dinner at All Blue, then Nami probably would have never been to the restaurant and she definitely wouldn't have seen the handsome owner.

Finished with taking everyone's order, the two waiters began to make their way towards the exit. Nami noticed Sanji quickly stand up and exit with them. She couldn't tell if he looked angry or determined. What the hell did Usopp say to him? Her eyes followed the blond man even through the aquarium glass. As he disappeared into the kitchen area, she sighed. She could really use that water now.

â€|

Sanji entered the kitchen and began removing his suit jacket. There was already a small group of kitchen and wait staff beginning to form around him. Ivan-chan came into the kitchen and found Luffy. "What's going on?"

"Sanji's going to cook one of the dishes!" Luffy had on a huge smile. He enjoyed watching Sanji cook, but he preferred when the food was for him.

"What?" Ivan-chan couldn't believe it. He ran up to Sanji. "Candy boy! Did you see the lady I was talking about?"

"Yes, I did, Ivan-chan. Thank you for informing me about her." He replied with a mischievous smile. He handed the purple-haired hostess his suit jacket as he put on an apron. "Would you mind putting my jacket in my office when you get a chance?"

Ivan-chan took the jacket but wanted more details. "Well, was it her? What are you going to do?" Sanji was rolling up the sleeves of his blue pinstriped dress shirt.

"What else? I'm going to make her dinner." He had a huge grin on his face. There was a collective 'ohhh' from the staff in the kitchen.

â€|

While the party guests were waiting for their dinner, the servers, Ace and Marco, began to distribute the drinks. Receiving her water, Nami took a sip and then pushed some of the ice cubes around in her glass with her straw. "What do you think I should do, Robin?" She mumbled, "I don't know if I'll be able to properly introduce myself to him now."

Robin turned from her conversation with Franky. "Why ever not? You're still you and he definitely seems interested in you." The older woman even witnessed it herself a few minutes ago. "Why would anything be different now?"

"Because he owns one of the most exclusive restaurants in town." Nami frowned. "He probably has expensive tastes and is extremely cultured andâ€|"

"He's also friends with Usopp." Robin interrupted her friend. Nami blinked. That was true. If Sanji was friends with Usopp then he had to be somewhat down-to-Earth, right?

Nami sighed. She needed a minute to think. "I'm going to powder room really quick," she whispered to Robin as she got out her seat. Making her way through the restaurant, Nami found the room down a small hallway.

Minutes later, after coming out of the powder room, Nami could hear a round of applause and cheers coming from across the hallway. Peering through a circular window in a door, she saw that it was the kitchen. A large group of restaurant staff was gathered and at the very center was Sanji. He was actually preparing something, although Nami couldn't see what.

What kind of guy is this? Well, of course there was a high chance of him being a chef if he owned a restaurant, right? Although some celebrities owned restaurants without knowing the first thing about food. Sanji put the finishing touches on the dish and the group around him began to dissipate. As Nami saw a waiter coming towards her, she quickly walked away from the door.

â€|

Sanji removed his apron when he was satisfied with the dish and nodded to Ace to include it with the rest of the meals for the dinner party. Exiting the kitchen, he noticed a pair of red high heels leaving the hallway and walking back towards the private dining room. Sanji followed her until he reached the bar opposite the wall aquarium and sighed. Her cream colored dress was beautiful, of course. It also exposed her flawless back. He pushed out thoughts of what he would like to do to the dress tie at the back of her neck. He didn't need to risk another nosebleed.

Ace and Marco were distributing everyone's dishes in the private dining room. Sanji watched through the wall aquarium as Nami took her seat. He rested his elbow on the edge of the bar and placed his chin in his right hand, eagerly waiting to see her reaction. He held his breath as she took a bite. First there was surprise, then pleasure, and finally joy flashed across her beautiful face. Sanji wanted to punch the air in triumph and faint at the same time.

The two waiters came out of the dining room and headed back towards the kitchen with the serving trays. Sanji stopped Ace briefly and asked if Nami had ordered anything to drink. "No, she only wanted water," the waiter replied before following Marco into the kitchen. That was unacceptable! She deserved something to complement the meal.

Sanji went back behind the bar. "Marimo, I need a drink!"

"Well, so do I, but you don't see me drinking on the clock!" The green-haired bartender replied.

Brushing off the snarky reply, Sanji explained. "It's for one of the guests at the dinner party."

"Usopp's party?" Zoro questioned. He was friends with long-nose as well. "I already made all of their drinks."

"This one wasn't ordered. I'm adding it." Sanji explained as he got down some of the top-shelf vodka along with triple sec, dry vermouth, and orange bitters.

Zoro gave his boss a quizzical expression. "Is this for a woman?"

"Yes," Sanji replied honestly. He grabbed an orange and started making an orange twist for garnish.

The bartender could tell from the ingredients that his boss wanted an Orange Martini. He started making the concoction. "Geez, eyebrows! Weren't you just moping about a woman at a cafÃ© only a couple days ago?" He started shaking the martini. "Now you've already moved on to someone else? You just need to get laid."

Sanji usually would have kicked the bastard for a comment like that, but he was in a good mood. Shaking his head, he replied. "It's the same woman."

Even Zoro was surprised by this information. He stopped mid-shake on the martini. "No way!" He snorted. "She knows Usopp? How?"

"They work at the same place," Sanji explained. He found a martini glass and started preparing it.

Zoro poured the martini into the glass. "Huhâ€| Small world." Sanji added the curly orange twist garnish. The bartender laughed at him. "It looks like your eyebrow!"

"And if it was Midori, it would match your moss-head." Sanji shot back. He picked up the drink and brought it to the end of the bar. "Thanks for the help, marimo!"

Ace was about to head back to the private dining room to check on the guests when Sanji stopped him again.

â€|

No salmon had ever tasted this good before. Nami couldn't believe it. Was all of the food on the menu really **that** good? If so, she could see why the prices were so high.

Suddenly, an orange drink in a martini glass was placed down next to her. "What's this?" Nami asked the waiter with the freckles. "I'm sorry. I didn't order this."

"It's an Orange Martini, madam." The waiter smiled and said in a hushed voice. "Compliments of the chef." Nami blushed. Would he?... Nah, it couldn't be.

Resting against the end of the bar with his chin in his right hand, Sanji spent the past half hour watching Nami through the aquarium wall across the room as she finished her salmon with orange fennel sauce and Orange Martini. Seeing her enjoy the meal brought a serene smile to his face. He couldn't remember the last time he felt so calm. Now the party guests were having cake, which meant that the dinner party would be over soon.

"Are you going to sit there all night just staring at her, or are you going to talk to her?" Sanji looked to his right to see Zoro standing next to him, drinking a beer on the clock. _There went the serenity._ "I mean, if you want, I can go talk to her. She's not really my type butâ€|"

Sanji sighed. He knew moss-head was teasing him. The bartender was ****really**** lucky that he was in a good mood. "I still don't know what to say to her." Sanji's voice had a tinge of discontent.

"Just tell her that you made her meal. That would make me fall in love with you." Zoro and Sanji looked to their left to find Luffy standing next to them. He was eating a giant turkey leg while staring at the party through the aquarium wall. He looked at both of his friends. "What?" Sanji turned to Zoro, who just shrugged at him.

"Or you could tell her that the next dinner is at your place." Luffy, Sanji, and Zoro all turned to the right to see Ivan-chan leaning on the bar with his head cupped in both hands. "She really is a rare beauty, candy boy!" Both Zoro and Luffy looked to Sanji expectantly.

"Okay, that's enough meddling in my non-existent love life." Sanji rubbed his forehead. "All of you back to work." There were protests and complaints, but the busboy, bartender, and hostess all listened to their boss. Their suggestions did give Sanji an idea, though.

â€|

The guests at Usopp's birthday dinner were finishing their cake. Ace and Marco were handing out the bills for each guest. Usopp was happy to see that Sanji didn't charge him for his meal. He had said something about it being his gift to him.

Nami poked at the unfinished half of her chocolate cake. It was good, but extremely sweet. She could only take a few bites before having to stop. Then again, it could have been her loss of appetite. With the dinner party winding down, she couldn't help feeling a bit down that she didn't get to see more of Sanji throughout the evening.

Ace came to her table to hand out everyone's individual bill for their dinner. Nami took the black leather holder and held her breath before surveying the damage. She opened the holder to see a receipt with no charge. Her meal had already been paid for. _But who wouldâ€_| Then she saw the small handwritten note at the top of the bill:

I hope you enjoyed the meal. It's on me. â€" Sanji

Nami smiled. This was something that she didn't feel was appropriate to share, not even with Robinâ€| well, at least not yet. Taking the

pen included in the holder, she tried to think of a response.

â€|

Ace and Marco brought the payment receipts back to the cash register. Usopp's guests were starting to leave. Sanji assisted the two waiters at the register. He happened to glance up to see Nami leaving with her raven-haired friend. She looked around the restaurant as if searching for something. When she saw him, she smiled and blushed. Then she gave a small nod and silently told him, "Good night."

Sanji returned her smile and responded with a silent, "Night." Then she was gone again. At least this time Sanji found out a little bit more about her. Unfortunately, this new information made Nami even more attractive in his eyes. How would he ever be able to work up the courage to speak to her now?

"Hey boss, this one is for you." Ace interrupted Sanji's forlorn thoughts. The waiter handed him one of the leather bill holders. Sanji opened it to see the receipt for no charge that he had prepared for Nami. Under the "tip" section of the bill, she had left a response:

_Thank you! The meal was delicious, _

_but I would have much rather preferred your company. â€"
Nami_

Sanji was elated. He immediately went over to show marimo. "Well, that's nice," the bartender commented. "Did she leave her phone number?" Sanji froze.

â€|

"Well done. Did you include your phone number?" Robin asked Nami. Franky was driving them home since they both had been drinking. Nami thought that Franky only offered to take them home so that he could finally ask Robin out on a date. That wasn't Nami's concern since she was going to be dropped off first. She knew Robin could take care of herself.

None of this saved Nami from cringing in embarrassment for forgetting to include her phone number with her response to Sanji. "Now he's going to think I'm some horrible woman who takes advantage of kindness."

"Does Usopp know your number? Maybe Sanji can get it from him?" Robin offered from the front seat.

"No," Nami sighed. "I don't think I've ever given my number to Usopp."

"Well, it looks like you'll just have to ask Usopp for Sanji's number when you're at work on Monday." Robin was so brilliant. That was why Nami enjoyed having her as a friend. The younger woman smiled as she looked out the window of the back seat. _I'll just have to ask Usopp for Sanji's number on Monday._

9. Sunday morning

Sunday mornings were Sanji's day to sleep in. Working until close on Saturdays usually left him exhausted. Thankfully, both he and the old geezer agreed when creating the schedule for All Blue that the restaurant would be closed on Sundays. That way they could both take a break. Now, whether or not Sanji could get his body to sleep past 8:30am was another matter.

Blue eyes gently opened to the sound of rain tapping against the bedroom window. Sanji took a deep breath and blinked a few times. He was on his right side with one pillow under his head, as usual. Then he looked down and realized that his left arm was wrapped around the other pillow, clutching it against his chest. He frowned and let out a sigh.

Nami was in his dreams again last night. This was the fifth night in a row. It was getting ridiculous. He didn't even really know her. Yet the dreams were getting more and more vivid, especially after their brief interaction, or non-interaction, last Friday at Usopp's birthday dinner.

Watching her enjoy a meal that he specifically prepared for her, her smile as she silently told him "good night," and her note to him that she would have liked his company all left Sanji feeling overjoyed, but nervous at the same time. Nami was beautiful and had to be intelligent if she was a broadcast meteorologist. Usopp tried to say that she was ruthless with men, but how could Sanji believe that when she showed the common sense to not date people in the workplace?

The one thing that kept nagging at him was that Nami didn't leave her phone number with her note. Marimo was quick to point it out to him and suspected that she was just manipulating him for getting a free meal. Sanji tried to give her the benefit of the doubt in that maybe she just forgot, much like he did when he read it. He tried to get her number from Usopp after the dinner party, but his friend didn't have it.

Now it was Sunday, Sanji's day off, and all he wanted to do was spend the day getting to know Nami. It would have been a perfect day to meet with her for coffee or something, even with the rain outside. Instead, it was looking like he would have to try meeting her at the sandwich shop again next Tuesday. Two days felt like too long of a wait.

With a sigh, Sanji checked the time on his phone: 8:25am. He buried his face in the pillow and groaned at his circadian rhythm. Might as well get up. He threw on a pair of sweats and went to the kitchen.

The first thing Sanji usually did on a Sunday morning was make a cup of black tea and have a cigarette before starting breakfast. Opening the cabinet, he paused. Shit. He forgot to pick up tea the last time he went grocery shopping. So now he had two choices: 1) Go to the grocery store two blocks away just to pick up some tea, or 2) Stop at the small coffee shop along the way and relax before going to the grocery store to pick up more tea. Considering that both required him to take a shower and get dressed, Sanji decided on option two.

â€|

Sundays were bittersweet for Nami. On one hand, Sunday mornings were usually the most relaxing of the week. On the other hand, Sunday meant that Monday would not be far behind along with yet another workweek.

Brown eyes gently opened to the sound of rain hitting the bedroom window. Nami knew it was going to rain today. Not that she minded the rain as long as she didn't have to go anywhere. Thankfully, today was one of those daysâ€| if she wanted it to be.

Oh, who was she kidding? She spent all of Saturday cleaning, doing laundry, anything to keep her mind off Sanji. No matter what she tried, she couldn't stop thinking of the handsome, blond co-owner of All Blue who bought her dinner at Usopp's party. She also suspected that it might have been her plate that he was preparing when she saw him in the kitchen. Robin told her in the car ride home that while the food was good, it wasn't anywhere near what Nami described.

Burying her face in the pillow, she sighed in frustration. She had planned to wait until Monday to ask Usopp for Sanji's number. The wait was torturous though. Nami needed to get out of her apartment today and get some fresh air. She checked the time on her phone: 8:30am. Good. Maybe she could waste some time at the small coffee shop below her apartment, but only after taking a shower first.

â€|

Nami finished drying her hair and put on a dark grey jersey dress that fell to the middle of her thighs. The rain caused the temperature to feel a bit chillier than it had been, so she pulled on a dark blue cardigan as well. Not really thinking of going anywhere else other than the coffee shop, she slipped on a pair of black ballet flats. Grabbing her small handbag, she locked her apartment door and went down the stairs. Knowing that she wouldn't be in the rain long, Nami didn't bother to bring her umbrella.

Two floors down from Nami's apartment, on the ground floor, was a small coffee shop called Le Chat Noir. Why the owner decided to name their coffee shop after a famous cabaret was beyond her comprehension. At least they had both coffee and tea, along with various bakery items. Entering the shop, Nami ordered milk tea and an orange cranberry muffin.

Picking up her muffin and drink, she looked around the small shop for a place to sit. It was still a bit too early for the Sunday brunch people to be out yet, so there were a few seats available. Then she saw him.

In the corner, sitting next to the window, was a now familiar blond manâ€| or at least he was familiar in appearance. He was dressed down from the three-piece suit he wore last Friday. This time he was wearing an orange T-shirt, black hooded fleece jacket, jeans, and black adidas Samba shoes. Busy reading a magazine, Sanji must have not seen her enter the shop. Nami felt a warm smile form on her lips.

* * *

><p>AN: I just wanted to say thank you for reading so far! I appreciate the reviews. ^^ I also wanted to point out that I wanted at least one outfit where Nami and Sanji were wearing each others' colors. So here they are. _

10. Le Chat Noir

Le Chat Noir wasn't the best cafÃ© in town, but Sanji liked their selection of tea and baked goods. While he enjoyed baking, he never really had the time for it when taking prep time into account. The croissant he just finished was decent, but he knew he could make a better one.

Now he was flipping through the city magazine's annual "Best of" issue while he drank his black tea. It was no surprise that the old geezer's restaurant, The Baratie, was selected as "Best Restaurant" for the fifth year in a row. It was something the old man was very proud of, although he would never admit it to Sanji. What was surprising was that All Blue was a close second. Sanji didn't expect his restaurant to even make the list considering that it only opened a little over a year ago.

"Sorry, is this seat taken?" The soft female voice brought him out of his thoughts. Sanji blinked. Where had he heard that voice before? Looking up, he could have sworn he heard a loud "thud" from his heart.

Standing in front of him was the same woman he had dreamt of last night, and the night before thatâ€¦ for the last five nights, actually. She was dressed casually in a grey dress and blue cardigan but no less beautiful. Sanji almost expected to see her usual red heels. Instead she had on black flats. Her copper hair hung down in loose waves like it had just been dried. Sanji opened his mouth and then closed it, trying to remember how to speak.

Nami blushed, making her even more endearing to Sanji. "Do you mind if I sit with you?" She almost pouted. It took a lot of courage just to approach him. Now her confidence was wavering.

"Uhâ€¦ No, please! By all means," Sanji jumped up from his seat to pull out the chair opposite him. He closed his eyes and let out a slow, deep breath as she sat down. _Keep calm, keep calm, keep calmâ€¦_

He took his seat again across the small table from her. There was still a glow in her cheeks as she tried to think of what to say. "Ah!" Her eyes met his again. "I don't believe we've properly met. I'm Nami," she smiled as she held out her right hand to shake his.

Gently taking her hand in his, he introduced himself. "Sanji," he replied before kissing the top of her knuckles. His blue eyes looked up at her as he slowly let go of her hand.

Nami didn't think it was possible to blush more than she already was. Taking a breath to recollect her thoughts, she remembered something she had wanted to say to him in person. "I never did get to properly

thank you for the dinner last Friday. It was absolutely delicious."

Sanji beamed. "You're very welcome. I'm glad that you enjoyed it." Food was always a safe topic with him. He had no trouble discussing it. "I actually prepared it for you." The words slipped out of his mouth before he could stop them. Oh no! She's going to think I'm some obsessive weirdo!

"I suspected as much." Nami replied with a grin. "From what I heard, the other meals were no where near as good as mine." She took a sip of her tea. Her response put Sanji at ease.

"Ah, I'll have to talk with Carne about that then." He nodded with a chuckle.

"So you don't usually cook?" Nami questioned. She was genuinely curious why someone so talented wasn't head chef of the restaurant.

"Not as much, no," Sanji replied. His eyes were downcast in thought. "I was the Sous-Chef at The Baratie up until about a year ago. Then my adoptive dad and I decided to open All Blue together."

"Chef Zeff is your dad?" Nami wasn't aware that the co-owners were father and son.

"**Adoptive** dad," he emphasized. "We argue about a lot of things, but I'm grateful that he allowed me to do most of the planning with the restaurant. I decided the layout, dÃ©cor, and even created the menu myself."

"I was very impressed by the ambiance," Nami revealed. "It felt like the entire restaurant was underwater. It was very relaxing. I can see why it has become such an exclusive restaurant."

Sanji frowned slightly. "I kind of wish it wasn't so exclusive. I never wanted to create a restaurant that would have to turn people away, but now reservations usually need to be made a month ahead." He took a sip of his tea. "I don't want people to feel like they're not good enough to eat there."

Nami watched his face carefully. She could tell that Sanji cared about the restaurant and food very much, but he was also facing the realities of managing a business. It didn't appear to be too burdensome when she saw him there last Friday though.

Lost in thought, Nami began to unwrap her muffin. Glancing up, she noticed that Sanji was watching her. His cheeks turned slightly red with embarrassment. "Sorry! Iâ€| uhâ€| was just wondering if that was a cranberry orange muffin." He couldn't tell her that he was thinking about how nimble her fingers looked.

Nami gave him a knowing smile. Unlike his friend Usopp, Sanji wasn't a very convincing liar. "Yes," she replied. Then looking him in the eye, she coyly asked, "Would you like some?"

The way she presented the question, Sanji thought his head was going to explode. Relax! She's only talking about a muffin. Curiosity got the better of him. He sat slightly forward in his seat. "Just a small

piece, if you don't mind."

Breaking off a piece of the muffin, Nami held it out across the table as if she were going to feed it to him. The confusion on Sanji's face made Nami second-guess her actions. "Umâ€œ| Maybe I should put it on a napkin or someâ€œ|" Her words trailed off when she felt him grasp her hand in both of his.

The warmth of his mouth was soon around the tips of her thumb and forefinger. His tongue was soft as it licked against her. Then he made eye contact with her as he sucked the remaining crumbs off of her finger. Nami was speechless. The blush in her cheeks had returned full-force. Sanji gave her a clever smile. "It's delicious, but I can do better."

11. Cold Tea

"It's delicious, but I can do better." The clever smile Sanji gave her was now turning into a devilish grin. He had caught Nami off-guard. The look of surprise and arousal on her face thrilled him. Knowing that he caused her reaction made it even more enjoyable.

Nami blinked and looked away, exhaling softly. At least her already flushed cheeks hid her embarrassment. She was used to being the one in control, easily getting desired reactions out of men. The fact that someone could so effortlessly elicit such a strong response from her body was slightly unsettling.

The uneasiness on her face did not go unnoticed. Sanji frowned slightly. He never intended to make her uncomfortable. Still holding Nami's right hand in both of his, he softly kissed her fingertips in apology for his brazen behavior. His thumbs gently massaged her palm.

The tender action caused Nami to face Sanji again. His blue eyes were so remorseful; he resembled a puppy after being scolded. She couldn't help giggling at his adorable expression. Hearing her laugh made Sanji smile.

"So, you like oranges?" he asked timidly. He continued to gently massage her hand. Touching Nami gave him an electrifying tingle he had never felt before.

She let out a soft chuckle. "Is it that obvious?" The flush in her cheeks faded to a slight blush. The massage Sanji gave her was relaxing. His touch was so delicate she didn't want him to stop.

"Just call it a cook's observation," he explained with a smile. He warmly kissed her palm before gradually letting go of her hand. Nami shivered in response. Sanji could be both arousing and affectionate. It made her immediately crave his touch again. She took a deep breath to steady herself.

"I grew up on an orange farm," she disclosed as she picked at her muffin again. "My mom ran it up until she died. Then my sister took over." There was a hint of loneliness in her voice.

"I'm sorry," Sanji offered. The information made him want to comfort her or care for her. From what he had heard and observed of Nami so far though, she seemed more than capable of caring for herself. This may have been why she reacted the way she did to his bold move earlier. Perhaps she wasn't used to being susceptible to the actions of others and the vulnerability frightened her.

With eyes downcast, Nami just shook her head. "It's okay. It happened a long time ago." She ate a small piece of the muffin before taking a drink of her tea. "I still call my sister every week, so I'm fine." She put on a brave smile, but Sanji could tell that the memory still hurt to talk about. He chose not to further push her on the subject.

Taking a drink of his tea, Sanji was disappointed to find that it had gone cold. Then he remembered that he had intended to go to the grocery store. Suddenly, an idea came to mind. "Hey, Nami." He grabbed her left hand with his right.

Her brown eyes came up to meet him again. She gave him a questioning look. Sanji took a hopeful breath. "Do you have any plans today?"

She shook her head. "No. Why?"

He smiled at her reply. "Can I make you dinner tonight?" His thumb brushed over her knuckles.

Nami could feel the warmth in her cheeks again. She shyly nodded. "I would like that."

"There's a catch though," Sanji clarified.

"What's the catch?" Nami responded with some apprehension. Although she didn't know him that well, Sanji didn't seem like the type of guy who would ask for perverted favors in exchange for food.

He grinned at her. "You have to help me make it, which includes coming to the grocery store with me." Sanji could easily prepare a four-course meal for Nami by himself, but he wanted to spend the whole day with her. That had been his desire since he woke up and now that he was given the chance to get to know her, he refused to waste it.

Nami smiled with a hint of relief. "Sounds fun, as long as you remember that I'm not a professional chef and you don't boss me around. You're not at work today."

"I wouldn't dream of it," Sanji replied. He then lifted Nami's left hand to his lips, making her blush again. She wasn't used to such affectionate behavior, but it definitely wasn't a bad thing. Still holding her left hand, he asked, "Are you ready to leave?"

She nodded, but then looked out the window. The rain was still falling steady. "I didn't bring my umbrella, though."

"No worries." Sanji stood up and helped her out of her seat. "We can share mine."

* * *

><p>AN: Thank you again for reading so far! Sorry for the short chapter, but things at the coffee house had to be wrapped up before moving on. The next chapter should be much longer. ^__^

12. In the Street

The grocery store was only a block away from Le Chat Noir and two blocks from Sanji's apartment. Sanji and Nami exited the coffee shop. Pausing under the awning, he pulled out a cigarette and was about to light it when he turned to his companion. "Do you mind?" He didn't want to bother her if she hated cigarette smoke.

Nami shook her head in response. "No, it's fine." Her mother used to smoke as well. The scent of tobacco could be comforting at times, although she would never dream of smoking. Sanji finished lighting his cigarette and took a drag.

"Well then," he exhaled. He opened his umbrella and held it over them with his right hand. "Shall we?" He offered her his right arm. Nami blushed as she shyly took his arm with her left hand.

It was going to take some time for her to become accustomed to Sanji. His affectionate, gentleman-like behavior was completely foreign to her. Nami was used to men who were completely self-centered, or were only interested in her body, or always seemed to think less of women. Most men were easy to manipulate because they were complete perverts who lost any trace of intelligence once they saw a peek of her cleavage. Sanji probably had a perverted side to him as well, she saw a hint of it when he licked her fingers, but at least he had manners and seemed to respect her.

"So, Usopp said that you're a broadcast meteorologist?" The question interrupted Nami's train of thought. She blinked and nodded. "How come I've never seen you on television?" Sanji was completely baffled as to why they wouldn't use such a beautiful, intelligent woman to present the weather.

"Because that's Cavendish's job," Nami smiled. She preferred to be behind the scenes.

"Is that the blond guy that looks like that one female singer?" Sanji barely remembered him at Usopp's birthday dinner. The man was sitting at the same table as Boa Hancock and they bickered all night over who was more beautiful.

Nami laughed. "I thought I was the only one who thought that!" Sanji smiled. He liked hearing her laughter. "When I was hired, he actually threatened me that if I ever tried to take his job, he would make sure I never worked in meteorology again."

"What a prick! Want me to go kick his ass?" Sanji's response made Nami laugh even more. Such language from a gentleman was unexpected. She had to remind herself that he was also a friend of Usopp's. Of course he would be somewhat normal.

"No, thank you." Her laughter subsided. "I prefer what I do."

"Which is?" Sanji asked with a genuine curiosity.

"I work with a small group of people. We gather the data for the forecasts," Nami explained. "I would never want to be one of the actual presenters. I don't want an ego the size of Boa Hancock's."

It was Sanji's turn to laugh. "I am very grateful that you are not like that woman. She's a nightmare."

Now Nami was curious. She glanced at his profile. "You sound like you know from experience."

He nodded while he took another drag from his cigarette. "One of the old man's friends, Rayleigh, tried to set us up a while back." Smoke blew out of his mouth as he exhaled. "It was one of the longest nights of my life."

"In a good way or bad way?" They stopped walking for a moment as Sanji mulled over his companion's question. Could a long night be a good thing? He felt warmth spread in his cheeks when he realized what she meant.

Meanwhile, Nami looked at him expectantly as she waited for an answer. She knew Hancock was a beautiful woman. Anyone with at least one eye could see that. The men at work always fawned over her. Sanji was handsome enough to probably spend a night with Hancockâ€| not that anyone knew anything about her love life.

Pushing away thoughts of what a ****good**** long night with Nami would involve, Sanji nearly coughed out his cigarette. Clearing his throat, he regained his composure. "Umâ€| No. It was definitely in a bad way. Physical beauty does not equal a beautiful heart and Hancock was a prime example of that." Somewhat relieved, Nami smiled at his response. It was proof that he wasn't shallow. They continued walking again.

As they turned the corner, Sanji was about to compliment Nami on her beauty, but he noticed that she was just staring ahead in shock. He immediately became concerned about her. "What's wrong? Are you okay?" He followed her line of sight but only saw the front of the grocery store with a few people outside.

"It's my ex-boyfriend." Nami spoke in a hushed voice. She looked like she was going to be sick.

"What, really? Where?" Sanji looked back to the front of the store. "Which one is he?"

"The guy with the goatee and tattoos." Nami was cringing now. It had been over a year since they broke up, but she still didn't feel like seeing him.

"The one with black hair?" Sanji questioned. He saw a tall, slender guy dressed in jeans and a black hooded sweatshirt with the front zipped down, revealing a yellow t-shirt. Under the hood of his sweatshirt was a white hat. The man's arms and hands were covered in tattoos. Dark circles were visible under his eyes, giving him a look of exhaustion.

"Yesâ€|" Nami nodded. Sanji could sense how uncomfortable she was.

Putting out his cigarette, he switched the umbrella to his left hand. Wrapping his right arm around Nami's waist, his hand grabbed her hip and pulled her close to his side.

"Should we make him jealous?" Sanji whispered as he nuzzled against her ear. He smiled when he heard a sigh escape her lips. There was a faint scent of citrus in her hair. He resisted the strong urge to kiss her neck.

Nami felt her cheeks burning. She closed her eyes, trying to regain her thoughts, but her mind was completely blank. Every nerve in her body seemed to be on fire. She needed something to hold on to. Reaching out, she grasped Sanji's left hand that was holding the umbrella. Her body turned slightly towards his.

"Your hands are so warm." He breathed against her neck. This may have been a mistake on his part. Sanji had intended to help Nami by making her ex jealous. Instead he was left wanting her more than ever. This was no dream. He couldn't just embrace her and start making out with her in the street without consequences. Feeling how fast she was breathing and the warmth radiating off her body, she had to be turned on as well! right?

"Nami-ya?" The deep, bored voice snapped them both out of their aroused trance. They looked to see that her ex-boyfriend had approached them. Sanji wanted to yell at him for interrupting such an intimate (and sexy) moment. Nami stopped him by gently squeezing his hand.

"Law!" She took a deep breath. Sanji could feel that she was trying to calm her body. She still held on to his left hand. "How are you?"

"Fine, thanks." His bored expression matched the boredom in his voice. Seeing him up close, Sanji saw that Law had grey eyes. His face looked even more worn than when he was farther away. Is this guy strung out on something?

Law noticed their close embrace. "You seem to be doing well."

"Uhâ€| yeah!" Nami laughed nervously. "Law, this is Sanji Vinsmoke. Sanji, this is Trafalgar Law."

"**Dr.** Trafalgar Law," the man corrected her. Sanji only nodded out of courtesy as he held Nami closer. What kind of pompous asshole is this and how dare he correct a lady!

Nami felt his grip tighten on her waist. She tried to ignore his fingers pressing into her hip and the unbidden arousing images that came to mind as a result. Taking another deep breath, she turned to Law again. "Sanji co-owns All Blue and is a chef." She smiled as she saw a way out of the interaction. "We're actually on our way to the grocery store to get things to make dinner tonight."

"Ah, that's cool." Law's expression didn't change. Nodding his head, he began to take his leave. "Take care, Nami-ya."

Sanji watched the man until he turned the corner. "What a weirdo." Then he turned back to Nami with a grin, "Now, where were we?" He was about to nuzzle her neck again, but she put her left hand to his

mouth, stopping his advances.

Exhaling deeply, she smiled at her companion. "We need to buy groceries or else we are never going to get started with dinner." Nami felt him pout behind her hand and she could have sworn she heard him whimper. She giggled at his reaction. "Maybe if we can at least get that done, then I'll give you a kiss on the cheek."

Sanji smiled behind her fingers and kissed them before pulling his mouth away. "Deal," he said as he stood up straight again. Keeping his right hand on her hip, he led her towards the grocery store. "What did you ever see in that guy anyway?" he asked out of curiosity.

"He was cool and had tattoos. He could never make room for me in his busy schedule though." Nami shrugged. "For a cardiac surgeon, he didn't really know about matters of the heart."

* * *

><p>AN: I love Law and wanted to include him somewhere in the story. Sorry for the "room" pun. ^__^

13. Apartment 32

Grocery shopping wasn't something that Nami usually put much thought into. Generally, she would make a list of what items she needed and then go buy it. There were a few homemade dishes she would make for herself on occasion, but it was difficult to buy fresh produce without at least some of it going bad before she could use it. All of this made grocery shopping feel more like a chore than an enjoyable experience.

Upon entering the grocery store, Nami unconsciously let out a discouraged sigh. Sanji, on the other hand, was completely in his element. First he insisted they get a small cart rather than a hand basket. This made Nami question exactly how much food they would be cooking. Then he grabbed a small bouquet of daffodils, which he claimed was important for dinner despite the fact that they would not be eating the flowers. As long as he was paying for them, then it didn't matter.

Now they were wandering in the produce section. "Was there anything you had in mind when you suggested dinner?" Nami asked him. She would rather leave things to the professional chef than trying to plan a meal, but she didn't want to spend all day in the store either.

"Why, was there something you were craving?" Sanji grinned at her. Getting his mind out of the gutter, he cleared his throat. "I was thinking roast chicken, but I wanted to see if you had a preference for spices or vegetables." Nami shrugged and shook her head in response. He laughed. "You're not making this easy for me, my dear."

"You're the chef," she cunningly smiled. "I'm just your assistant, remember?" Was she trying to challenge him?

Challenge accepted. With his left hand on his hip, Sanji quickly

scanned the shelves of vegetables. He rubbed the scruff on his chin with his right hand. Suddenly his clever smile from earlier returned. He turned his head towards Nami. "Have you ever tried endives?"

â€|

Finished with buying the groceries, Sanji and Nami walked the two blocks back to Sanji's apartment in the rain. The chef had decided on roast chicken with endives for dinner, and a chocolate orange tart for dessert. He insisted on carrying the bag of groceries and the umbrella as well. When Nami tried to help him, he refused several times until he finally relinquished the bag carrying the daffodils and bottle of Bourgogne blanc wine, which from what she could tell was an expensive French Chardonnay. She couldn't imagine paying so much just for a bottle of wine, but Sanji expressed that it went extremely well with chicken and was "well worth the price."

As they approached the apartment building, Nami paused in surprise. Sanji noticed her reaction. "What?" He hoped that there wasn't another ex-boyfriend lurking somewhereâ€| unless it involved trying to make them jealous.

"You live here?" She looked up at the floors of the building. It was one of the more upscale apartment buildings. She walked by it every weekday on her way to work.

"I hope the accommodations are acceptable to your tastes, miss." He gave her a slight bow. "Now, if you don't mind taking the umbrella so that I may get the door for you, I would greatly appreciate it." She gave him a slightly annoyed look, but took the umbrella and closed it before he opened the door for her.

â€|

Taking the elevator to the third floor, they walked down the hallway to apartment 32. Sanji would have usually taken the stairs, but he could never ask a guest to do the same. He still had the bag of groceries in his left arm as he unlocked his apartment door with his keys in his right hand. Nami watched him with interest, especially since she offered to help him again and he still refused. "Do you always juggle things when trying to unlock your apartment?"

"Only when there is a lady named Nami present." He smiled as the lock clicked. Opening the door, he waved his arm inside. "After you, mademoiselle."

Nami suppressed a gasp in awe. There was a short tile entryway before stepping up into a clean, open, and very modern apartment. It had wood floors, which she guessed was bamboo, but she couldn't be certain. She peeked around the corner of the entryway to the left to find what looked like the living room area furnished with a matching chocolate brown couch and chair. A large flat screen television was mounted to the wall.

"Shoes, please," Sanji said softly behind her as he closed the door. She turned to look at him and then looked down to see that she was at the edge of the tile entryway. Putting the bag of groceries down on the wooden floor, he removed his shoes and placed them in a shoe cabinet on the right wall of the area. From the same cabinet he

grabbed a pair of dark blue hard-soled slippers and put them on.

Blushing, Nami slid off her ballet flats to reveal black lace liners. She never had to remove her shoes in someone else's house before— at least not that she could remember. "Ohhh, those are sexy," Sanji teased as he hung up his fleece jacket. He smiled when the blush in her cheeks grew darker. "Would you like a pair of slippers?"

"Yes, please," she replied with a nod. She placed the bag with the daffodils and wine next to the one filled with groceries. Sanji took out a black pair of hard-soled slippers similar to his. Placing them on the wooden floor, he took Nami's right hand and helped her while she stepped up into them. The slippers were a bit big on her feet. She figured they must have been a men's size.

"I hope you don't mind that they're an old pair of mine." Sanji confirmed her thoughts. "Can I take your sweater and purse?" Nami handed him her handbag and then removed her blue cardigan. Giving it to him with a smile, she turned, picked up the bag with the daffodils and wine, and began to wander into the apartment.

Sanji took a slow, deep breath as he hung up her sweater. He didn't realize how much of Nami's curves the cardigan hid. In the two times he had seen her prior, he could tell she had a nice body, but none of her previous outfits clung to her like the short, grey, fitted, sleeveless jersey dress she was currently wearing. It took everything in his will power to remember his manners and not stare at her like some sort of bloody-nosed, lecherous creep.

Moving further into the apartment, Nami noticed a dining area directly to the right of the entryway. A dark wood, counter height table seating four filled the area. To the left of the dining area was a hallway that most likely led to a bedroom and bathroom. Left of the hallway entrance was the kitchen area. It was an impressive kitchen and Nami guessed that it was probably why Sanji chose the apartment. The area was tiled and granite countertops lined the wall, with glass tiles covering the backsplash. A large island separated the kitchen from the rest of the apartment. All of the appliances were stainless steel. The stove was both extraordinary and intimidating, with a large matching range hood overhead.

"Don't worry. It won't bite." Sanji spoke in a low voice near her right ear. Nami felt the warmth of his left hand on the small of her back briefly before he walked past her into the kitchen. Placing the bag of groceries on the island, he began to take out the various ingredients for their dinner. "It's a little after noon. Would you like some lunch before we start?"

"As long as it's no trouble." Nami approached the island. "What should I do with these?" She held up the bag with the wine and flowers.

"I'll take the wine," Sanji gently took the bag from her and removed the bottle. Then taking out the daffodils, he handed them to her. "Would you mind putting these in the glass vase on the table and fill it with some water?" Nami hadn't noticed the vase in the center of the table. Picking up the glass piece and walking back into the kitchen, she went to the sink to fill it with water.

"Do you often have flowers as a centerpiece for dinner?" She asked as she turned on the tap. They were almost back-to-back with him at the island and her at the sink.

"Again, only when there is a lady named Nami present." He replied with a smile, although he knew she couldn't see it. Having their backs facing each other made him feel a bit braver. "I really like your dress, by the way," he commented.

Nami softly chuckled in response. "Thank you. I really wasn't planning on going anywhere aside from the coffee shop." She turned off the tap and smiled. "I didn't know that you would be there."

"I'm glad I was," Sanji replied.

"Me too," she said quietly.

Time seemed to stand still for a moment. Neither one could move. Nami paused with her hand on the sink tap. Sanji had long finished taking out the groceries and was hanging onto the counter ledge. His head hung forward in thought as he imagined various romantic scenarios that could occur if he could just turn around.

Nami held her breath, waiting to see if he would make a move. He had been so affectionate towards her earlier. She noticed his reaction when she removed her cardigan. Was he afraid of her now?

Squeezing his eyes shut, Sanji took a deep breath and sighed. The groceries still had to be put away or else they would spoil, especially the chicken. He also needed to make lunch. His pride as a chef was at stake if dinner was ruined. At that moment, he made a bargain with himself that he had to focus on making dinner for her first. If she liked dinner, then he could try to kiss her afterwards.

* * *

><p>AN: A bit of trivia. Daffodils are the March birth flower and Sanji's birthday is March 2nd. ^^ Also, I imagined Sanji's apartment having a genkan-type entryway. Please look it up if you don't know what they look like. Genkans are pretty cool.

>

14. Preparations

Focus on dinner first. Sanji sighed. That didn't mean he had to completely ignore her though, right? He turned around to face Nami, but was surprised to see that she was already facing him. The vase full of daffodils was in her left hand. Taking hold of his arm, she leaned up and gently kissed him on the cheek. "What was that for?" His voice was quiet.

Nami smiled at him. "For getting the groceries," she replied and then went to put the full vase of flowers on the table. Sanji touched his cheek where she kissed him. He had almost forgotten their deal at the grocery store earlier. "Can I help you put them away?" She walked back into the kitchen.

"I would appreciate that." He gave her a wide, happy grin.

â€|

After putting away the groceries and sharing an artichoke spread sandwich for lunch, Sanji and Nami began to plan for dinner while drinking tea. Sanji had a pen and note pad out as he wrote down what food would be prepared and when. Nami could tell that he was a professional. This wasn't his first time preparing a dinner, even if it was just for two people.

"We should probably start the tart first, that way it will have enough time to chill before dessert. When we finish that, then we can start the chicken. The endives will be cooked last." He sighed as he started getting the dry ingredients for the tart out of the closet pantry. "It's times like this I wish I had a double wall oven. Then we could bake the tart and chicken simultaneously without having to worry about different temperatures, cooking times, or flavors mixing."

Nami wrinkled her nose at the thought of a chicken flavored chocolate orange tart. "They actually make ovens like that for homes?" She helped by taking the ingredients from him and placing them on the counter. "I thought they only had them in restaurants."

"Yeah," Sanji confirmed as he went to the fridge next. He passed her a carton of eggs. "If I ever own my own place, that's the first thing I'm going to make sure it hasâ€| Well, that and a decent walk-in pantry."

"You don't want to stay here?" Nami was curious as to why he wouldn't want to stay in such a nice apartment. Her apartment wasn't anywhere near the size of his, but she hadn't considered moving or trying to buy a home. What was the point for one person to own a home? She hated cleaning and couldn't see herself having to clean a whole house by herself, not to mention the maintenance that would come with it.

Sanji was grateful that his face was hidden behind the refrigerator door. He could feel it burn with embarrassment. "This place is nice if you're single, but it's hardly ideal for a family. I don't even know if it would be enough room for a couple."

"Now that you mention it, you didn't show me the rest of the apartment yet." Nami leaned over the island counter as she tried to peek down the hallway to the left. Sanji happened to glance at her while she was bent over the island and quickly hid back behind the refrigerator door. That was close! He nearly had a nosebleed. "How many bedrooms do you have?"

Don't ask that right now! Sanji pinched his nose. Her question was innocent enough, but the bedroom was the last thing he wanted to think of after seeing her in that position. Calm down, calm down, calm downâ€| He took a deep, unsteady breath. "Well, technically two, but I use one of them as an office."

"That's much more space than I have." Nami looked amused when he finally closed the refrigerator door. He couldn't have been in there that long to just look for the butter and an orange. She could still

sense when someone was checking her out. Putting her hands behind her back, she feigned innocence. "Do you want to show them to me?"

The split-second look of shock on Sanji's face almost made her start laughing. He was going to be fun to tease, which she decided wasn't cruel because she could already tell that she liked himâ€| immensely. Flustered and blushing, he finally stumbled out a response. "Umâ€| Maybe later."

â€|

The tart was finally in the oven. Nami didn't think it would ever get in the oven after the amount of chilling and baking the crust took alone. Now she could understand why Sanji wanted to start preparing dinner 4 hours ahead of when they would actually be eating. Still, she enjoyed watching him cook, especially when he made the marbled effect between the chocolate and orange fillings.

While the tart was baking in the oven, Sanji began to get the ingredients out for the chicken. "Is there anything you want me to do?" Nami had helped with the tart, but now she felt like she wasn't much use where the chicken was concerned.

"If you wouldn't mind taking the tart out when it's ready, that would be a huge help." Sanji smiled as he began to season the chicken. "I don't want to be near our dessert if I've just been handling raw chicken."

Just then the timer dinged and Nami looked to the oven. Putting on oven mitts, she pulled out the dessert. Sanji couldn't help checking her out as she did so. Nami wearing his slippers, too big for her feet, and oven mitts while holding a dessert was an image that he would enjoy dreaming about. The only thing missing was an apronâ€| and maybe if she were naked under said apron. He shook his head, stopping there. They didn't need blood all over the chicken.

"If you wouldn't mind putting the tart on the cooling rack, we'll wait for it to cool before putting it in the fridge to chill." Sanji explained. Nami did as she was told. "You can also keep the oven on," he added. "The chicken is ready to go in next."

â€|

Now came the wait. The chicken had to be cooked in intervals and at varying temperatures. The first round required the bird to be turned twice while cooking for 30 minutes. Currently they were in the second round, in which it had to cook for 20 minutes at a lower temperature. Sanji asked Nami to get a bottle of red wine out as he chopped onions and shallots for the next step.

"So, do you always cook at home?" Nami put the bottle of red wine on the counter as Sanji washed his hands. Leaning with her back against the counter, she briefly wondered how his hands weren't dried out from the amount of washing he had to do while cooking.

"Hmmâ€|" He seemed to be thinking it over before giving his answer. "I guess it depends on what day it is and if I'm working or not."

"How so?" If Nami could cook then she would always eat at home. It

would definitely save money.

"Well, I always have breakfast at home." He nodded as he thought about it. "But as far as lunch and dinner are concerned, I'll usually eat at work if I'm there."

"What if it's your day off?" Nami blurted out the question without thinking. She was curious if she would get to see him at the cafÃ© again on Tuesday.

Drying his hands with a towel, Sanji considered her question.
"Wellâ€¦ Today is one of my days off. We've already had lunch here and we'll be eating dinner here."

Nami unconsciously began to pout a little. She really wanted to see him again. "Then again," he interrupted her thoughts, "I've also gone out to grab something for lunch before." A sly smile pulled at the corner of his lips, "but you already knew that." She let out a small laugh as she blushed. Sanji watched her reaction with a deep fondness. Taking a step towards her, he decided to ask, "So, what was that neck move you did in the cafÃ©?" His tone was playful.

"Oh God, that was embarrassing!" She covered her face, but Sanji could see the bright red in her cheeks. His smile grew.

"No, please. I was wondering if I could see it again." He watched her intently.

"Ugh, it's really silly, but my friend Robin taught it to me," she explained. She took a deep breath and turned her side towards him, resting her right hand on the counter for balance. "You're supposed to reach behind your head and pull your hair to the other side, exposing your neck andâ€¦"

Her words trailed off when she felt the warmth of Sanji's body pressed behind her. His right hand rested on top of hers while his left caressed her hip. He grazed his lips from the base of her neck to her earlobe. "And?" he whispered in her ear.

Nami could barely think through the arousal currently overwhelming her body. "It'sâ€¦" Her breath was coming so fast that she could barely get out the words. "It's supposed to attract attention."

"It's very effective." Sanji breathed the words against her ear. The soft moan he received in response thrilled him. His lips ran along her neck again and he thought of when he first saw her in the cafÃ©. At the time he had pondered what her skin would taste like under his tongue. Just as the tip of his tongue met the softness of her neck, the timer on the oven dinged.

"It's the chicken." Nami let out a deep breath. It was crazy how fast he could get a reaction out of her, but where she was uncomfortable with that thought in the coffee shop, she now decided that it wasn't a bad thing. It definitely was not bad at all.

Sanji closed his eyes and took a deep breath, the scent of citrus pleasantly filling his senses. A soft, frustrated groan came from his throat. He wanted to say, _"Fuck the chicken!"_ He wanted her. The oven dinged again and he let out a defeated sigh. Kissing her hair,

he then leaned down and whispered in her ear, "Until later."

15. Hunger

"Until laterâ€|" The promise softly vibrated in her ear, causing a pleasant shiver of excitement. Then the warmth of his body was gone. Nami turned to see Sanji adding the chopped onions and shallots to the pan with the roast chicken. He then put the pan back in the oven and set the timer. "Okay, this time it needs to cook for 10 minutes."

When Sanji turned back to Nami, he felt the strange pull in his heart again. It was stronger than any urge he ever had. He wanted to hold her, kiss her, and take her to his bedroom where he could take his time exploring every part of her. Instead he was tending to this damn chicken in the oven only because he wanted to impress her and he didn't want to ruin dinner. He sighed, trying to hide his inner turmoil. "Do you mind if I go smoke outside really quick?"

"No, go ahead." Nami gently smiled at him. The agitation was visible in his face. He was trying so hard to make sure that dinner was properly made, but if he felt the same way she did at the moment, she knew he was craving something other than food. "Is there anything you want me to do in here?"

Sanji looked at the oven. "I don't think I'll be that long, but if the timer goes off, could you add the red wine to the pan?" He smiled when she nodded in reply. "Thank you," he said softly as he made his way to the sliding glass door that led out to the balcony.

â€|

As soon as Sanji stepped outside and closed the door, he took a deep breath of the cool late afternoon air. The pounding of his heart felt like it was moving into his throat. _What's she doing to me?_ He quickly took out a cigarette while trying not to think of the feel of her hip under his hand, the warmth of her body pressed against him, or the sound of her soft moan in response to him. Closing his eyes, he lit his cigarette and took a deep drag. He exhaled while listening to the sound of the rain hitting the cover over his balcony.

No one had ever had this effect on him before. He remembered Usopp's words from the dinner party Friday night. _Or is this just you blindly chasing after yet another woman?_" Sure, Sanji had a weakness for women and he would gladly cater to them if possible, but Nami was on a completely different level. Spending the day with her, he couldn't see how anyone would call her manipulative or cruel. She was beautiful, kind, gentle, playful, and now Sanji's heart ached with a longing to get to know her even more. One day with her wouldn't be enough time to satiate his appetite.

Did Nami feel the same? Would she allow him the chance to see her again after tonight? Finishing the last of his cigarette, Sanji decided that he had to try. That was probably why this dinner was so important to him. He wanted to secure the chance to see her again.

â€|

Entering the apartment, Sanji was greeted with the warm smell of roast chicken. At least nothing was burnt. "Ah! Good timing!" He looked up to see Nami at the oven with the red wine. "The timer had just gone off and I added the wine, but I wasn't sure if the temperature should be lowered."

Walking up to her side, he put his right hand on the small of her back and lowered the cooking temperature with his left. Closing the oven, he set the timer for 15 minutes. "Thank you," he softly nuzzled her hair while he took the wine from her with his left hand and placed it on the counter. Was he suddenly getting bolder?

"You're welcome," Nami blushed as she replied. There was the faint scent of tobacco and rain on him. Without realizing it, her body turned towards him. Her hands rested on his chest, feeling the damp humidity in his T-shirt. "You feel cold," she quietly noted. "Is it still raining?"

"Yes," Sanji replied, his nose was still nestled in her hair. With her hands on his chest, he was sure Nami could feel his heart pounding. His left arm wrapped around her back while his right hand gently pressed her hips into his. There was a small gasp near his ear and he grinned. "Do you want to warm me up?"

The words came out before he had time to consider whether or not they were appropriate. They definitely were not the words of a gentleman. He hadn't intended to be so forward and, for a moment, fear of rejection gripped his heart. That is, until he felt Nami's hands slide up from his chest to the back of his neck. Slender fingers tenderly raked up through his hair. Soft lips grazed and pulled at his earlobe. "I don't think 15 minutes is long enough for what I want to do," she purred in his ear.

Sanji's breath caught in his throat in shock. She felt the same?! He closed his eyes and sighed when he felt her place a kiss under his ear. "But I also know how much work has gone into making this dinner," Nami continued. She pulled her face back enough so that she could look at him. Brushing his lower lip with her thumb, her gaze shifted from his mouth to his eyes. "It would be a shame if it was ruined, right?"

With a slight frown, Sanji nodded. Nami gave him a reassuring smile. "So, until after dinner, you can have this." She leaned in and gently kissed him. The contact was unexpectedly overpowering. Craving more, Nami leaned in again and soon gentle kisses turned passionate.

Overcome with desire, Sanji pulled Nami's body against his. Grabbing her hips, he briefly considered taking her on the island counter, but that wouldn't be very romantic for a first time at all. He shouldn't have been thinking about that at a time like this anyways. If he couldn't regain control soon, then dinner would most definitely be ruined. He felt her tongue caress his, causing him to let out a short moan into her mouth. "Nami!" There was a yearning in his voice that called to her a deep level.

Suddenly, the oven timer dinged again. Seeming to remember the task at hand, they slowly pulled away from each other. Both were panting with arousal. Nami leaned with her back against the island to support the shaking in her legs. Her cheeks were flushed. "Wow," she

whispered.

16. Un dîner pour deux

The oven timer dinged, signaling that the chicken was done. Sanji leaned against the counter across from Nami. His eyes were closed as he took a few deep breaths, trying to calm his body. The plan had been that he was going to attempt to kiss her after dinner, and only if she enjoyed the meal. He didn't think that she would be kissing him first.

He could still feel the warmth of her lips, the softness of her tongue, and the curves of her body. *"Stop!"* He was trying to calm his arousal, not get turned on even more. "Wow," he heard Nami whisper. Sanji had to smile in response, even with his eyes still closed. She must have felt the same.

Nami hung onto the island counter across from Sanji and breathed deeply as she tried to stop the trembling in her body. She had planned on only giving him a gentle kiss to satisfy him before dinner. Little did she know how much more she would crave him after having a small taste.

The timer dinged again. When Sanji felt calm enough, he opened his eyes and went to the oven. He cleared his throat, focusing on dinner. "The chicken is done, but I need to cook the endives. That won't take long though."

"Is there anything I can do?" Nami approached him. Sanji gently placed his outstretched hand on her shoulder, holding her at arm's length. He feared that if he let her get any closer, he would no longer be able to control himself and would most definitely be carrying her to the bedroom, dinner be damned.

"We're going to need plates and wine glasses. Oh, and we'll also need the Bourgogne blanc. It should be chilled by now." He went to the fridge to get out the endives and wine while Nami found the cabinet with the dishes. Sanji placed the wine on the counter for her, then reached into one of the lower cabinets to pull out a fry pan. He quartered the endives and placed them in the pan with water, butter, and white wine vinegar. Then he added a bit of sugar, salt, and black pepper.

While braising the endives, Sanji snuck a glance at Nami as she set up the wine and glasses at the dinner table. He smiled, thanking whatever fate, luck, or chance he was able to be in the coffee shop at the same time as her that morning. Even if the night were to end horribly now, at least he could say that he got the chance to talk to her.

â€|

Dinner was served. Braised endives accompanied the roasted chicken carved by Sanji. Nami picked up her wine glass. "I feel like we should toast to something. What should we toast to?"

"To us?" Sanji offered.

Nami shook her head. "Too cheesy."

"To you?" Sanji smiled.

Nami laughed. "That's even cheesier."

"Okayâ€|" Sanji thought for a moment. "To Le Chat Noir, because if we both hadn't been there this morning, then we wouldn't be having this dinner together right now."

Nami smiled and nodded. She couldn't argue with that. "To Le Chat Noir."

Their glasses clinked in cheers. Sanji picked up his silverware, but he watched Nami with great interest. He wanted to see her reaction. Would she like the meal or not? As she took a bite of the chicken, Sanji noticed a similar reaction to when she ate the salmon he prepared in the restaurant. Surprise, pleasure, and then joy all flashed across her face. "Well?" He smiled at her. "What do you think?"

"It's delicious! This is the best chicken I've ever tasted," she commented in awe. Satisfied with her response, he took a bite of his own. The chicken was excellent, of course.

"Just make sure you leave room for dessert as well." Sanji took a sip of his wine and tried not to think about the personal dessert he wanted for later. He didn't really have a taste for sweets, but Nami would definitely be an exception.

â€|

"Ah, that was one of the best meals I've ever had." Nami sat back in her chair as she finished her second glass of wine. Sanji had been right. The Bourgogne blanc was excellent with the chicken and ended up being worth the price.

"Only 'one of the best' that you've had?" Sanji smiled as he cleared the dishes from table. He walked into the kitchen area to put them in the sink.

Nami hopped out of her chair, grabbing the empty wine glasses and following him into the kitchen. "Well, the other one was the salmon dish at your restaurant." She thought for a moment. "The Orange Martini was really good as well."

Sanji laughed. "I'll have to let marimo know that you liked it." He rinsed off the dishes before putting them in the dishwasher.

"Marimo?" Nami thought of the little Japanese moss balls that people sometimes kept. She handed him the wine glasses.

"The bartender at the restaurant," Sanji clarified. "He's an asshole but he's also a good friend. I picked the Orange Martini to go with your meal. He made it."

Nami leaned on the counter next to the sink and rested her chin in her right hand as she watched Sanji rinse out dishes. "I think I noticed him checking Robin out when we were leaving the dinner party. His name is Marimo?"

Sanji shook his head. "No, that's just what I call him. Did you see his hair color?" Nami giggled in response. "His name is really Zoro but don't tell him that I referred to him by name."

"Do you have any other friends that work at the restaurant?" She wasn't sure why, but Nami found hearing about Sanji's friends interesting. He went on to tell her about Luffy, the short busboy who was eating the turkey leg. Then there was Ivan-chan, the purple haired okama who was the hostess and manager of the wait staff. Ivan-chan was actually the one who tipped Sanji off that Nami was at the dinner party.

"And, of course you know Usopp," he added. He was now putting a portion of the chicken and endives into a storage container before storing the rest in the fridge. Nami noticed that he put a portion of the tart in a storage container as well.

"Yeah," she replied, staring at the storage container. She looked to Sanji. "Is he afraid of all women, or is it just me? He always seems nervous around me."

Sanji gave her a sideways glance while he tried to think of the best way to respond. Nami was very intelligent and could see through any lies or flattery. He sighed. "Well... Usopp is a bit intimidated by you."

Nami couldn't help pouting a bit. "That's weird. I've never been rude or mean to him."

"Oh, it's definitely not you," Sanji confirmed as he finished wiping down the counters. "I guess the men at your work are just afraid of you because you've never given them a chance when they tried asking you out. That's just common sense not to date in the workplace."

"Of course." Nami nodded. "Brook, one of my first supervisors, once told me, 'Don't dip your honey where you make your money.' I don't understand why they would be afraid of me for that."

Sanji brushed a lock of red hair away from her face. "'Don't dip your honey where you make your money.' I don't think I've heard that one before." He chuckled. "Brook sounds like an interesting guy."

"He was an old pervert who always tried to look at my panties," Nami replied as she stood up straight again. Sanji started laughing. "That advice was probably the only useful thing he ever said to me."

"Wellâ€|" Sanji walked up to her, wrapping his arms around her waist. "I can't really blame him for wanting to see your panties." He playfully reached down with his right hand and began to slowly lift the hem of her short, fitted dress. "I'm a bit curious myself," he spoke in a hushed voice.

Giving him a mischievous smile, Nami grabbed his wrist, stopping his ascent. "You'll just have to wait and see if I show them to you," she teased. With a flirtatious look, he released the hem and slid his hand up her thigh to her hip.

As Sanji stood up straight again, he noticed on the wall clock that

it was almost 8pm. "It's starting to get late." He looked back to her. "Do you have to work tomorrow?"

Nami nodded, crestfallen. She wanted to spend more time with him. The day had gone by too quickly. "I should probably get home," she said quietly.

He wasn't enthused, but Sanji understood. "I'll walk you home." It was a statement, not an offer. It was still raining, Nami didn't have her umbrella, and he would have never let her walk home at night unaccompanied.

â€|

Sanji walked with Nami to the coffee shop they met at earlier. "You live here?" He wasn't aware that there were apartments above Le Chat Noir. Now that it was pointed out to him, he noticed a stairwell entrance near the cafÃ© windows.

"It's not as fancy as your apartment, but I like it." Nami looked up to her small balcony. Thankfully she did the laundry the day before. Nothing would have dried in the rain that had been falling all day.

"Do you mind if I walk you up?" Sanji knew that her apartment building was probably safe, but he wanted to make sure that she got inside her place without any trouble. It would have been rude to just leave her.

Nami agreed and they walked up to the second floor. Sanji watched as she put her keys in the deadbolt. When the door was unlocked, she turned to him. "I had a lot of fun today," she blushed. Why was she having difficulty making eye contact with him?

"Me too," Sanji replied. He could feel his heart beating faster. "Can I see you again sometime?" The fear of rejection was still tight in his chest even after hearing that she enjoyed spending time with him.

"Of course!" She looked up at him and then shyly looked away. "I would like that." It was unlike her to feel so bashful. Was she anticipating something?

"Alright then," Sanji smiled. He gently tilted her chin up as his left arm pulled her closer. His heart was pounding. Looking into her brown eyes, he whispered, "Goodnight." Leaning down, he softly kissed her.

Turning to leave, he heard Nami's voice. "Sanji, wait!" There was a pull on his left arm and he spun around to be met with her lips pressed against his. Her left hand had a firm grip on the back of his neck.

It only took a moment for Sanji to get over his initial surprise. His hands snuck underneath her cardigan, holding her body against his as he returned her kiss. Pressing her into the apartment door, he instinctively pushed his hips against hers. Nami gasped and he moved to her neck, finally tasting her skin with his tongue.

Reaching for the handle behind her with her left hand, Nami opened

the door and pulled Sanji into her apartment. The door closed behind him. They pulled at each other's clothing as they made their way through the living room. Sanji's jacket ended up on the back of a chair. Nami's sweater was on the floor by the couch.

Once they reached her bedroom, Nami grabbed Sanji's T-shirt and pulled it off while he kicked off his shoes. With his left arm around her waist, Sanji grabbed the back of Nami's thigh with his right hand, lifting her up and putting her down on the bed. The room was dark, but he could see her fine from the streetlights outside as he looked down at her. Leaning down, he kissed her. His tongue gently caressed hers while his right hand slid up the outside of her thigh, under the skirt of her dress, to the soft skin of her hips.

Feeling the lace fabric of her panties with his fingertips, Sanji blinked and suddenly realized their situation. He had been so overcome with lust, he didn't even stop to consider Nami's thoughts or feelings. What if she didn't want this? What if she was going to regret this?

"Nami!" His voice came out low between breaths. His thumb grazed back and forth over her hip under her dress. Carefully watching her expression underneath him, he continued. "Are you? Are you sure you want to?"

A finger came to his lips, hushing him. She looked into his eyes. Her hushed voice spoke with complete clarity. "If there is ever anything that doesn't feel right between us, I will tell you." She took a breath, "and I expect you to do the same. Agreed?" Sanji nodded in response. There was a faint smile on her lips. "I don't want to stop right now." A small trace of worry flashed in her eyes. "Do you?" When he shook his head 'no', she sighed in relief.

With a smile, he pulled her finger away with his left hand. He gave her finger a gentle bite before turning back to her. "Now, where were we?"

17. Perfect

6:10am Nami heard the alarm going off on her phone. Reaching out with her right hand, she hit the screen until it shut up. Eyes still closed, she took a deep breath and stretched. Her body felt sore not in a bad way, but it was in a way that she hadn't felt in a while. Why did her blankets feel so heavy this morning?

Blinking her eyes open, Nami looked down to find a mop of shaggy blond hair. Well, that's a first. Sanji was wrapped around her with his head resting against her breasts. Could he really be comfortable in that position? She smiled as she gently ran her fingers through his hair. Golden strands were hanging down over his eyes. He looked like an innocent boy cuddling with a stuffed animal.

Remembering everything they did last night though, he definitely wasn't innocent. Nami blushed at the memory. Where any of her past experiences would have been satisfied once they finished, Sanji had a lot of stamina. Even when Nami thought they were done and just talking, he continued to caress and explore her body until they were both ready to go again. His ability to quickly elicit a response from her had been very advantageous. Similar to when he massaged her hand

in the coffee shop, his touch had been delicate, arousing, and affectionate. She lost track of how many times she came, but they didn't stop until sometime around midnightâ€| and only because they both had to work the next day.

Nami lightly traced the muscles in his shoulder and back with her fingertips. She had never slept with anyone on the first date before. It wasn't something she could ever see herself doing, but after spending all day with Sanji, she wasn't ready to say goodnight. Once he turned to leave, there was no hesitation in her decision.

This was also the first time anyone had stayed the night in her bed. None of her past boyfriends would hesitate to have sex in her bed, but as soon as they were finished, there was always some excuse for them to go home. The experience usually left Nami feeling empty and used. Waking up to someone cuddling her body like their favorite blanket was different, but also endearing.

Sanji stirred under her touch. The grip around her tightened as he took a deep breath and cleared his throat. Nami felt his eyelashes flicker against her skin as he opened his eyes and blinked. Raising his head, he squinted. As soon as he recognized Nami, a small smile appeared. "Hi."

"Morning," she giggled softly. His disheveled hair was such a contrast to his usual clean appearance. She attempted to comb the blond strands down with her fingers.

"Mmmmmâ€|" He nuzzled her skin and placed a kiss under her collarbone. "Are you a dream?" His morning voice sounded deeper and more throaty than usual.

"No." Nami felt her heartbeat quicken as his body rolled on top of her. His legs gently pushed hers apart and he came to rest between her thighs. She could feel him smile and then trail kisses up her neck.

"So last night wasn't a dream either?" His low voice vibrated in her ear, sending a wave of pleasure through her body. Nami let out a sigh. Sanji could feel her tremble beneath him.

"Not that I know of." Her right hand reached around his waist, fingertips running across the muscles in his lower back. She could already feel the deep pulling sensation that he seemed to awaken the night before.

He gave her a tender kiss. "What time is it?"

Nami reached for her phone to check the time. "6:15."

"What time do you have to get up?" Sanji pushed himself up on his hands. Gently squeezing her, he kneaded her muscles with his right hand as it slid down the curves of her body.

"7:00," she replied. It usually took her forever to wake up in the mornings. "Why?"

"Hmmmâ€| That doesn't leave much time." He looked her in the eyes and smiled as his right arm hooked under the inside of her knee. Nami gasped in surprise. "Let's see what I can whip up in 45

minutes."

â€|

7:15amâ€| Sanji lit a cigarette as he reached the sidewalk outside Nami's apartment building. Taking a deep drag, he blew out the smoke and smiled. He took one last glance at her balcony window before turning around. Putting his hands in the pockets of his jeans, he strolled back towards his apartment.

Perfect. There was no other way to describe it. Just perfect. She was perfect. Yesterday was perfect. Last night was **especially** perfect. Waking up with her was perfect. The past hour had been perfect. All of it was perfect. And now his damn heart was so happy, he felt like it could burst. _Ah~, perfect!_

As much as he wanted her all throughout yesterday, he would have been satisfied with the goodnight kiss he gave her last night. She completely caught him by surprise after that. He had never slept with anyone on the first date before. Usually it would take him at least three dates before he even felt comfortable enough to try. Nami was the exception, thoughâ€| because the way she made him feel was beyond exceptional.

Ohhhh, last night was better than any of his dreams. There was no first time awkwardness with her. Just hours of getting to know her body and all of the sensitive spots that he would be able to use for future purposes. Perhaps best of all was the fact that she was able to keep up with his voracious appetite. He didn't realize how much endurance she took from him until they finally decided to go to sleep. His body was exhausted to the point of falling immediately asleep as soon as his head hit the pillowâ€| or her breastsâ€| Which were also perfect.

Sanji reached his apartment building and jumped up the stairs two at a time. He didn't have to be at work until 10am, but he still needed to take a shower and change his clothes. He also wanted to make sure he had time to prepare something for the perfect goddess that would most likely be occupying his thoughts all day.

* * *

><p>AN: Just wanted to say thank you again for reading so far! I know some of you (or maybe all of you) wanted more *cough, cough* details about their first night together. As much as I would have loved to give them, I also have to follow the ratings rules, meaning no explicit stuff. I may write a separate chapter and post it on AO3 for anyone who wants to read. ^^_

18. Monday morning

No matter how nice the day could start, Mondays were always difficult. It wasn't even 10am yet and Nami had updated the forecasts for the noon broadcasts while juggling demands from the diva, Cavendish. "I don't want to look like a fool again! How am I supposed to cater to my fans if I can't give them a correct forecast?" He pouted in a handheld mirror while fixing his blond curls.

Nami rolled her eyes. She knew Cavendish wouldn't see her anyways. He

was too busy checking his reflection. If she knew one thing about the weather, it was that it could change at any minute. The morning crew had reported that the day would stay sunny. They couldn't predict the rain front being blown in along with cooler weather. Thankfully she decided to wear her turquoise cowl neck sweater dress. It would help protect her from some of the chill, although she wasn't looking forward to walking in the rain in high heels. The afternoon would most likely bring a thunderstorm. That meant that she should probably pick up lunch early before the rain started falling.

"Ummâ€œ! Nami?" She looked up from her work to see Usopp standing at the entrance to her cubicle. He looked as nervous as always. What was it that Sanji told her? Usopp was "a bit intimidated" by her. It was only because she had turned down the other guys in the building when they tried asking her for a date. The technician had never asked her out because, as far as she knew, he had always been with Kaya since they started working together. She briefly wondered what the other men had told Usopp to make him so afraid of her.

Taking out her frustrations on Sanji's friend wouldn't make sense considering that he wasn't the one that started the rumors. Nami took a steady breath and put on a smile. "Hi Usopp! How are you?"

"Uhâ€œ! Good, I guess." He took a timid step into her cubicle area and glanced at Cavendish, who was still checking his reflection. "Iâ€œ! I was asked to give you this."

An aqua blue box was thrust in her face. Nami flinched while taking the package. Upon closer inspection, the box was actually a stack of three plastic containers held together by a black elastic band. A small card was folded under the band. "Umâ€œ! Thank you?" She gave him an uncertain look. Why would Usopp give her a stack of aqua blue boxes?

"It's not from me!" The black haired technician held his hands out in embarrassment. "I'm just the delivery guy!"

"Well, thanks anyways." Nami smiled. Usopp nodded and practically ran out of her cubicle. She made a mental note to try to be friendlier to him, especially if he was one of Sanji's friends.

Cavendish gasped. "Why are you getting presents and not me? Don't tell me that you have fans now, Nami!" His fist was shaking in sudden jealousy.

"That's none of your business." She brushed off his ridiculous behavior. Handing the blond broadcaster her data, Nami started shooing him out of her cubicle. "Go on, now. I'm sure your fans are waiting for you."

After Cavendish left, Nami took the small card out from under the band. Unfolding it, there was a small note written inside:

Sorry I didn't have more time to prepare lunch for you this morning. Someone was keeping me busy. Hope you don't mind leftovers._

The note wasn't signed. There was only a small heart drawn under the message. Curious, Nami slid the black band off of the boxes and opened the top container. Inside was a piece of the chocolate orange tart she had for dessert with Sanji last night. The second container

contained some of the chicken and a quarter of an endive that they had for dinner. The third container was warm and filled with freshly cooked rice.

Nami let out a small giggle in disbelief. Sanji made lunch for her. She wouldn't need to worry about venturing out in the rain now. Beaming, she quickly packed the boxes back up and secured them with the black band. Running out of her cubicle, she made her way to the fact-checking department. I have to show Robin!

â€|

Mondays were usually quiet at All Blue. Business was steady, but not as busy as Fridays and Saturdays. Sanji worked from 10am to 6pm to take care of restaurant needs. The calm gave him a chance to prepare for the week, placing orders for supplies and scheduling large party reservations. The old geezer also worked on Mondays, but he stayed in the kitchen, acting as head chef. Sanji had no complaints about the arrangement, as long as they didn't have to argue about anything.

Around 11am, Sanji went out to smoke a cigarette and stretch his legs. Zoro was driving into the back parking lot with Luffy in the passenger seat. Ace must have not been scheduled for the lunch shift. Luffy couldn't drive, so he always carpooled with either his older brother or the moss-head. "Oooooi, Sanji!" he called as he got out of Zoro's vehicle, waving his hand in the air. "I'm hungry! Is there anything to eat before my shift starts?"

Sanji exhaled, blowing out a stream of smoke. "You'll have to ask the old geezer. He's head chef today." He never minded feeding his friends, but the way Luffy ate, he could go through all of the food in the restaurant if allowed. Someone had to reign in his appetite.

"Boo~! I don't like asking him. He's always grumpy." Luffy climbed up the stairs of the loading dock. Zoro sleepily followed behind him. It must have still been early for the bartender.

"Hey, marimo," Sanji called to Zoro. The green-haired man grunted in response. "Nami liked the Orange Martini you made on Friday," he grinned.

Zoro seemed to wake up. "Wait, what?"

"Who?" Luffy asked, completely clueless about whom they were talking about.

"The woman eyebrows made dinner for on Friday," Zoro clarified before turning back to Sanji. Luffy nodded behind him, still clueless. All he remembered from Friday was having a delicious turkey leg. The bartender continued, "How did you get to talk to her? I thought she didn't write her phone number down on the receipt."

"I ran into her at Le Chat Noir yesterday morning." Sanji was unable to hide his huge grin as he took a drag of his cigarette. Just remembering everything that happened made him giddy.

"Huhâ€| That's crazy," Zoro commented. Maybe now that eyebrows talked to the cafÃ© woman, he would stop moping around like a lovesick

puppy. "So what's the deal? Did she give you her number?"

"Well, she gave it to me this morning when I was leaving her apartmentâ€|" Sanji started.

"Wait, wait, wait!" Zoro interrupted him. "You slept with her?!"

"Huh? Who's sleeping?" Luffy questioned.

â€|

"Wait, you slept with him?" Robin's sky blue eyes were opened wide in surprise. It wasn't an expression that Nami often saw on her friend. The reaction made her feel a bit embarrassed.

The red-haired woman blushed in response. "It's not something I would usually do, but it just felt right." She looked down at the bento box in her lap. Her finger traced along the black band. "I enjoyed being with him so much that I couldn't say goodnight."

"And now he made you lunch?" Robin was stunned. When she last left Nami on Friday, her friend and the cafÃ© man didn't have each other's phone number. They hadn't even actually talked yet. Three days later and they not only had their first date, but they also slept together, and the gentleman spent the night at Nami's apartment. Turning her attention back to the bento, Robin smiled. "Well, that's very thoughtful of him," she observed.

â€|

"Geez eyebrows!" Zoro couldn't believe his ears as Sanji finished telling him about his and Nami's day yesterday. "When I told you that you needed to get laid, I didn't actually mean it." Sanji was in too good of a mood to be angry at the moss-head for his rude comment.

Suddenly the door to the kitchen swung open. Zeff, a cranky old man with a prosthetic leg and a long, pronounced mustache stuck his head out. "Hey, chibi nasu! You need to get in here and meet the new hostess!" Sanji scowled at the nickname the old geezer used for him.

"I don't remember hiring any new staff, you shitty old bastard!" If there was one thing that could ruin his elated mood, it was an argument with the old man. He extinguished his cigarette, stuck his hands in his pockets, and walked back into the kitchen.

"Ivankov and I hired her last Tuesday," Zeff explained as he limped through the kitchen area. "Today is actually her first day. You being one of the co-owners, you need to introduce yourself."

Ivan-chan opened the door to the kitchen. The new hostess followed in behind him. "And this is the kitchen area. You won't be in here as often as the waiters, but it's important to know your way around. Ah, and this is the other owner in addition to Mr. Zeffâ€|"

"Hi Sanji!" The girl's soft voice sounded excited as she peeked out from behind Ivan-chan. He froze as he immediately recognized her large, round eyes.

"â€| Pudding?"

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><p>Do-n!**

19. Afternoon Thunderstorms

"How the hell could you two hire Pudding?!" Sanji was pacing back and forth on the loading dock. A cigarette was puffing furiously in his mouth. Ivan-chan thought for a moment that the young man resembled a toy train going around on a circle track.

Zeff stood near the large loading door with his arms folded. He silently watched his adopted son throw a temper tantrum. "You knew who she was, old man!" Sanji glared at him. "Why did you hire her?! What the hell were you thinking?!"

Ivan-chan considered going back inside the restaurant. This was obviously something between Mr. Zeff and his son. The okama was thankful that he left the new hostess up at the front with Bon-chan. It would be inappropriate for her to hear this conversationâ€| or one-sided shouting match. He still wasn't sure why Sanji was so upset with them hiring the girl.

"Her mom insisted that she needed work experience in the restaurant." Zeff finally explained after a moment of silence from Sanji. His stone expression showed no sign of emotion.

"Why the hell would she want that? Is she trying to suddenly throw Pudding back at me? And why the hell would you allow Linlin to get her way anyways? I thought you were tougher than that." Sanji's fists were balled up with such pressure that his knuckles began to turn white.

"Have you ever tried saying no to Linlin?" Sanji glanced at him with a knowing look. "She's a very stubborn woman with some very high connections. Besides," Zeff continued, "I thought this was what you wanted."

"Two years ago, maybe, but nowâ€|?" Nami flashed in his mind. He only got to finally "meet" her just yesterday, but he already knew that he didn't want to let her go. How was she going to react to this? There was no question that Sanji was going to tell her. She promised to be honest with him and expected him to do the same.

Ivan-chan watched the blond man as the pieces came together. He only knew Sanji for a little over a year now, since the restaurant opened. Past details never seemed to be important, but this girl that they had just hired was a very important part of the young man's past. Ivan-chan also knew how caught up he was with the red-haired beauty that was at the dinner party. The okama suddenly regretted making the decision to hire the new girl because it now visibly created trouble for Sanji's romantic interest. "Candy boyâ€|" his voice was apologetic.

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Nami finally left work around 6pm. She had stayed for half an hour, hoping that the rain would at least let up a little bit before venturing out. Her red high heels were not ideal for rain puddles. It was when the thunder started to roll in that she knew that the rain was only going to get worse. Pulling up the hood of her grey twill parka, she made her way out into the thunderstorm.

Three blocks from her work, she started to feel the cold penetrating her fingers and toes. Passing The Mermaid CafÃ©, she breathed a sigh of relief. Nami was only a block and a half from her apartment now. Then she noticed that she was approaching Sanji's apartment building. Remembering the empty bento box in her handbag, she decided to drop it off for him. She wasn't sure if he would be home, but at least she could leave it near his door.

Walking into the upscale apartment building, Nami felt very much out of place. Water dripped off her coat onto the concrete flooring. At least she wasn't out in the rain anymore. She took the elevator to the third floor and walked down the hallway to apartment 32. Ringing the doorbell, she waited a minute before thinking that he must not have been home yet.

Nami was about to leave the bento box near the door when it suddenly opened. "Oh geez!" Startled, she jumped. "Sorry, I didn't think you were home yet. I just wanted to return these and say thank you for the lunch!" She smiled, but her warm expression faded when she noticed Sanji's appearance. His black dress shirt was un-tucked with a silver tie hanging loosely from his collar. His face looked worn and stressed. He looked at Nami like a starving animal seeing its first sign of prey in days.

Unconsciously, she took a step back. This wasn't the same man she had spent the day with yesterday. In a blur, Sanji grabbed her wrist and pulled her into his apartment. He moved so quickly, Nami could barely register what was happening. First he took the bento box from her and tossed it on top of the shoe cabinet. Next he pulled at her parka until the buttons became undone. "Sanji, what are you doing? What's wrong?" Her words seemed to fall on deaf ears. Pushing the jacket off of her, he threw it over the bento box on top of the shoe cabinet. He didn't even bother to hang it up.

Staring at her body, he sighed in a mix of appreciation and relief. Slowly he began running his hands over her curves. "If you keep staring and groping, then I'm going to have to start charging you." Nami broke the silence in an attempt to bring back the Sanji she knew. He blinked as he finally made eye contact with her again. "I have to warn you though, it can add up pretty fast." That at least got a small smile out of him before his expression turned anxious again.

Wrapping his arms around her, Sanji held Nami in a close embrace. His face was buried against her neck, in her hair. She finally heard his ragged breathing. Something was definitely bothering him. Her fingers combed through his hair in the sensitive place at the back of his neck that he told her he liked the night before. She gently kissed his shoulder as she attempted to calm him. "What happened to you?" she said softly.

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"Pudding?" Nami said in disbelief. She smirked to prevent herself from laughing. Who would ever name their child Pudding? "Chocolate or Tapioca?"

Sanji ignored her sarcastic remark. "Her mom likes sweets," he explained. His eyes were downcast in thought as he stared blankly at his hands in his lap.

They sat on the couch in the living area, facing each other. Nami rested her right elbow on the back of the couch and leaned her head against her hand. "You were engaged?"

"Two years ago," Sanji nodded. "Her mother never approved of me because I was just the Sous-Chef at the Baratie. So, of course, she made Pudding break up with me or else she would never inherit their family business."

"She's an heiress?" The more this story unfolded, the more Nami didn't like it.

"They own Charlotte Confectionaries," he clarified. Sanji still couldn't bring himself to look at Nami. He only had one day, one perfect day with this beautiful woman that surpassed any dream. Now she would hate him and walk out of his life forever, all because that shitty old geezer hired Pudding.

"So you opened All Blue in an attempt to prove that you were worthy of her?" Nami tried to remain calm, but the stress was choking her throat. Of course Sanji had to have baggage. He was too perfect in looks, cooking skills, and in bed to not have a flaw somewhere.

"No!" Sanji's eyes finally flickered up to look at her. "All Blue was a dream of mine since I was a kidâ€| long before I ever met Pudding." He sighed, already feeling defeated.

"Do you think her mom wanted Pudding to work at your restaurant so that she would get near you again?" Nami closed her eyes. They were starting to sting. She didn't want to cry. She was too strong to cry. "Now that you own a restaurant, I'm sure she approves of you."

"I don't know." Sanji answered honestly.

"Do you love her?" Tears were forming in Nami's eyes. She tried to blink them away. Why the hell was she crying? It wasn't like her to cry over a man.

He thought for a moment. "At the time, I thought I did. I thought I knew what love wasâ€| untilâ€| he was unable to finish his thought. Sanji stared at her. Until I met you, he wanted to tell her. It was too soon though. One day, or technically three days were not long enough to know if you loved someone, right? But what if it hits you like lightning?

At that moment, there was a flash of lightning outside and thunder crashed not soon afterwards. Nami got up and walked around the couch towards the entryway. "I should get going," she mumbled.

"What? No!" Sanji climbed up and jumped over the back of the couch. Grabbing Nami, he pulled her body close and embraced her from behind.

"Please don't go yet."

Nami closed her eyes and exhaled. Sanji's body was so warm against her. "I have to go. I have to work tomorrow, and I still have to make dinner."

"Well, I don't have to work tomorrow." He brushed her hair away so he could kiss her neck. "And you know I would never leave you hungry," he whispered suggestively in her ear. A soft moan vibrated in her throat. "Just don't leave me, please." He pulled the cowl neck of her sweater dress, exposing her collarbone. "I want you," he murmured against her skin.

End
file.